

NAVIGATING GRADUATE SCHOOL: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS,  
INSTITUTIONALISM AND LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES

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# NAVIGATING GRADUATE SCHOOL: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS, INSTITUTIONALISM AND LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES

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International students are often relegated to narrow discussions of English language learning, immigration issues or cultural events on campus, and are viewed as the purview of a limited group of scholars, which is unfortunate given their growing numbers in universities across the United States. This case study of two economics departments at two competitive research universities examines institutional and language ideology forces acting on students at the university, disciplinary, and departmental levels in order to better understand the ways that non-native English speaking PhD students experience graduate school. The study offers their perspective on current tensions at research universities, as well as policy implications.

Use of the institutional theory lens reveals how taken for granted the steps to graduate student success in economics can be. Much of what students need to do to be successful is learned informally; international students pick up on the norms and rules in much the same way as domestic students. PhD programs respond to disciplinary expectations, and tend to be relatively decoupled from the home university.

Language ideology, on the other hand, enables a specific examination of attitudes toward non-native English speakers in graduate school. Student voices, considered through the lens of the language ideology, offer perspectives that may not have been considered before. Differential treatment, tensions between groups, and what happens naturally in an unregulated diverse environment show that the system

could definitely work better than it does currently. Students receive very few direct messages about the importance of English language proficiency.

Another area of the study that will continue to be debated is the role of English in graduate student work, especially in mathematical fields. This study shows no consensus: English is of secondary importance to technical expertise in economics, though there is a general acknowledgement that some minimal level of language is needed. Clearly, stronger English skills would not hurt a graduate student, but devoting time to English at the expense of research or academic work is not necessarily favored. The only regulated form of communication for graduate students is teaching, which, depending on funding needs, is often not a priority.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Pamela Marie Pollock has a B.A. in Spanish literature from Bryn Mawr College and an M.A. in Foreign Language Education and Applied Linguistics from the University of Texas at Austin. Initially interested in how to improve foreign language education for American students, she has always been curious about language learning and cultural differences. During her time at UT, she began her work with international teaching assistants at the Center for Teaching Effectiveness. Her interest in international students and their role in higher education grew from there. She continued her work with international graduate students at the University of Missouri-Columbia. She then moved on to Cornell University, where she worked for five years in the Center for Teaching Excellence and pursued her PhD in Learning, Teaching and Social Policy in the Field of Education. She is currently teaching oral communication skills courses and developing programming for international graduate students at the Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning at Harvard University.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is commonly recognized that a PhD is a great accomplishment, but there is a general lack of awareness of what it is that really makes a PhD possible. While clearly a PhD is the result of knowledge, creativity and critical thinking, in the end my PhD was about persistence, and the ability to prioritize and stay focused. It was about remembering my goals and seeing them through. I would never have made it this far without a number of very special individuals.

I would first like to thank my husband, Thomas Huber, without whom I likely would not have had the resources or the commitment to see this through to the end. Tom and I met in a fateful way, through a classmate I met in the first class I took with Dr. John Sipple, the professor who was to become my advisor. When I took that class back in the fall of 2005, I had no idea that I would be lucky enough to meet both my husband and my advisor. When Tom graduated with his MBA from Cornell in 2006 and moved to Boston, I could have easily moved with him, but he encouraged me to stay and pursue my dream. We maintained our relationship at a distance for three years, married after I defended my proposal, and incidentally celebrated our one year anniversary the day after I defended my dissertation. After I moved to Boston, away from my Ithaca support network, he spent a year putting up with me, supporting me and cheering me on as I went through the writing process. Needless to say, I would not be here without Tom.

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Finally, I would like to thank my participants for their time and insights into these very important issues. Clearly this study would not have been possible without them.

Cornell University has turned out to be quite an important place in my life. My parents both got PhDs and began their careers there. I would not be here had my dad not made a long journey (by ship!) across the world from Quirindi, NSW, Australia, to Ithaca all those years ago, or if my mother hadn't decided she wanted to move beyond her teaching to pursue a PhD. They met and married in Ithaca, and so many years later I would begin my professional life there, get my PhD, meet my husband, and get married there. I can't say enough about how much I appreciate the opportunities I found around every corner on the Cornell campus, or what a wonderful place Ithaca is (though in March I do not miss it); it will always be a part of my home.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Non-native English speaking graduate students are currently studying in the U.S. in very high numbers, and at least in some fields, universities depend on them to fill important teaching and research positions, especially as the number of American PhD students declines (Committee on Science Engineering and Public Policy, 2005; Ehrenberg, 1992). Particularly in the hard sciences and engineering, international students are responsible for much of the successes, innovations, and even the number of patents, of particular departments. As a report from the Committee on Science, Engineering and Public Policy (COSEPUP) (2005) highlights, “if the flow of these students and scholars were sharply reduced, research and academic work would suffer” (p. 5). Such discourse is even making it in to the popular media; a recent *Time* article about Thomas Edison lamented the reduction in American innovations, pointing out that more than half of the doctorates in science and engineering awarded by US universities in 2007 went to international students. Innovation and success in research is dependent on the substantial proportion of international students working and studying at U.S. institutions.

Navigating graduate school can be a daunting task, regardless of nationality or English language proficiency. At a bare minimum, graduate students must learn how to meet their advisors’ expectations, the policies and procedures set out by their departments and universities, and the norms of their disciplines. To complicate matters, such expectations may or may not align, especially given the current turmoil going on in graduate education (Gumport, 2005). Non-native speaking graduate students clearly have additional issues to manage. In addition to all of the usual

challenges of learning the professional norms of graduate student life, they must figure out how to navigate these demands in a foreign language, in a foreign country.

Such demands call for an institutional perspective on graduate education: graduate students are expected to learn the norms and rules that both sustain and legitimate the system. Institutions are maintained by socialization, the dominant framework through which graduate school is viewed in the literature. Socialization in the graduate school context is defined as the process whereby “the graduate student acquires the skills necessary for entrance to and success in the professional milieu” (Gardner & Barnes, 2007, p. 371). Students are expected to learn particular norms and rules in preparation for future faculty positions. The norms and rules are associated with various organizational levels: students become members of departments, which are localizations of a discipline, but they are also subject to the policies and procedures of the universities within which their departments sit, as well as the external forces acting on all levels of the organization.

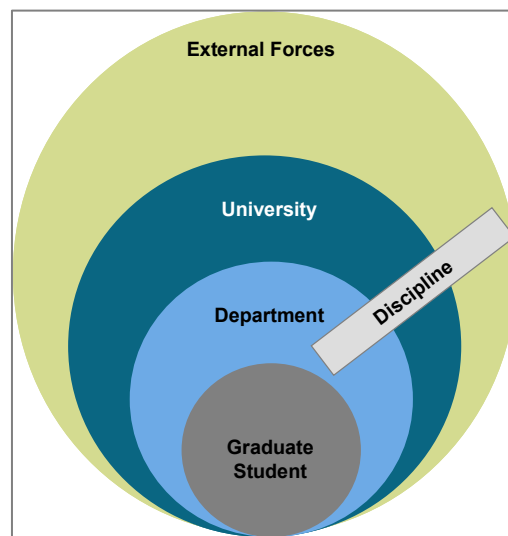


Figure 1: Context

In addition to fleshing out the complicated institutional forces surrounding graduate students, the current study makes a contribution to the literature in its explicit

consideration of what it means to be a non-native English speaker studying in the U.S. Despite their large numbers, international and non-native English speaking graduate students have not been the focus of much scholarly work. Research on graduate students places surprisingly little focus on international students. The marginalizing quality of English language ability is accepted in the language and counseling literature, as is the stereotype of the lonely and isolated international graduate student (Arthur, 2004). Language ideology literature (for example, Lippi-Green, 1998; Wiley & Lukes, 1996) argues that non-native speaker status invites the potential for misunderstanding, power differentials and discrimination. Understanding such issues is vital to the continued development and perseverance of graduate schools, whose dependence on international graduate students is only going to increase (COSEUP, 2005).

Research on the relationship between non-native English speaker status and socialization as an institutional process is needed, and will contribute to an understanding of the current challenges facing graduate school administrators, faculty and graduate students themselves. Given such a context, it is important to understand the institutional forces that graduate schools and graduate students face, and specifically how they impact non-native English speaking graduate students. Therefore, this exploratory study will fill a gap in the graduate school literature by bringing together perspectives from both organizational behavior and language studies in order to shed light on the complex issues surrounding non-native English speaking graduate students.

### Research Questions

1. How do non-native English speaking graduate students experience graduate school?

- a. How do university, departmental, and disciplinary rules, norms, and deeply embedded patterns of logic shape non-native English speaking graduate students' experiences?
- b. How do students navigate and influence such a system?
- c. How do university, disciplinary and departmental attitudes about English language proficiency shape their experiences?
- d. How do students navigate and influence attitudes about English language proficiency?

### Theoretical Approach

What happens to graduate students living their graduate school experiences should not be considered without an understanding of what is already known about the graduate school socialization process. If socialization is the process through which “the graduate student acquires the skills necessary for entrance to and success in the professional milieu” (Gardner & Barnes, 2007, p. 371), it is useful to isolate particular activities that are part of such a process. I focus here on three main socialization tasks common to graduate students: 1) finding and forming a relationship with an advisor, 2) holding teaching assistant (TA) and research assistant (RA) duties (hereafter referred to as work), and 3) fulfilling scholarly expectations (Weidman & Stein, 2003). While there are clearly other components of the process, and students do not go through these tasks in isolation (i.e. they may take cues from their peers or others), these three main socialization events are the experiences on which the study will focus.

This study takes a new approach, however. In addition to looking at the socialization process for non-native English speaking students, it uses the socialization process as a vehicle through which to examine institutional and language ideology forces acting at the university, disciplinary, department and individual levels from the

perspective of administrators, faculty and graduate students in order to better understand the ways that non-native English speaking graduate students experience graduate school.

Institutional theory highlights the external forces operating on organizations. Both macro and micro perspectives of the theory are relevant in this case; in particular, the micro perspective on institutional theory depicts institutionalization as a process through which external forces are articulated in the norms and rules of organizations. Moreover, language ideology operates at both macro and micro levels in shaping attitudes about non-native English speakers, the status of English, and perceptions of accent. Both theoretical lenses have some areas of overlap, particularly in the ways that they describe the influence of external forces on organizations, and are essential to the consideration of the problem. The current study looks at how institutional processes and language ideology play out in graduate student socialization, and particularly how they shape graduate student experiences.

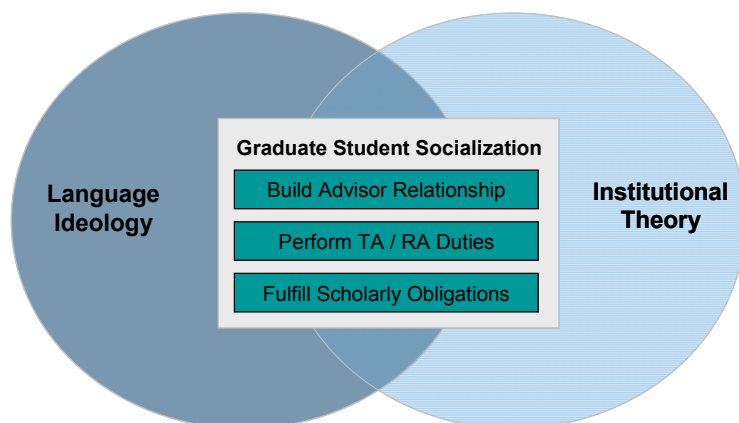


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

#### Literature Review

In order to understand the context for the current work, one must first understand the context of graduate education, issues surrounding graduate student socialization, institutional theory and language ideology. A review of all of these



areas can be found in Chapter 2: an introduction to the issue is offered here. Ashby states “a university must be sufficiently stable to sustain the ideal which gave it birth and sufficiently responsive to remain relevant to the society with supports it” (cited in Berdahl, Altbach & Gumport, 2005, p. 4). Graduate schools are currently struggling to maintain such a balance between autonomy and accountability. They now confront issues not limited to “financial pressure, growth in technology, changing faculty roles, public scrutiny, changing demographics, competing values and the rapid rate of change in the world” (Kezar & Eckel, 2002, p. 435). Moreover “legislators and community leaders call for greater attention by faculty members to apply knowledge to solve societal problems. These same constituencies expect university research to aid local and regional development” (Austin, 2002, p. 94). At the same time, social sciences are expanding and academic fields are changing (Frank & Gabler, 2006).

Graduate schools must manage their responsibility for undergraduate education with their dependence on external research money. Government and sponsored research “challenged the organizing principle that academic authority resides in decentralized, departmentally based graduate programs where faculty determine programmatic requirements” (Gumport, 2005, p. 426). In addition to the need to teach and conduct research, universities are constantly trying to keep up with one another.

Such challenges are ongoing, and it is unclear what effect they will have, or how they are currently unfolding within universities, disciplines and departments. Research that examines the impacts of these current external demands on graduate schools and graduate students is needed. It is accepted that graduate schools are facing challenges, and are being pushed and pulled by different forces. For example, one might imagine a non-native English speaking graduate student who must TA for an introductory class in his field at the same time that he is beginning his research program. Such a student has to learn how to teach and meet the expectations of

American undergraduates as well as departmental teaching expectations, while at the same time figuring out his research agenda and what is expected of him on that front. It is clear that most graduate students are juggling similar scenarios, largely because of the way universities are organized. The current study examines the effects of such forces, and specifically how they relate to the vast numbers of non-native speaking graduate students, by looking at specific elements of the graduate student socialization process.

Consideration of graduate student experiences in the literature center on socialization. While there are multiple definitions with slightly different wording, socialization is generally defined “as the process by which students acquire the attitudes, beliefs, values and skills needed to participate in the organizational activities of the profession” (Nettles & Millett, 2006, p. 89). As Nettles and Millett (2006) point out:

Given the restricted grades that students receive in doctoral programs and the individual tailoring of doctoral student work, the indexes of socialization in graduate school are especially important gauges of student progress and achievement. (p. 89)

More work is needed in this area, and other work on graduate student and organizational socialization is relevant here, as it provides a framework for considering the process that graduate students should go through when learning the norms and rules of their disciplines (Reynolds, 1992; Tierney, 1997; Trowler & Knight, 1999; Anthony & Taylor, 2001; Weidman & Stein, 2003; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Mendoza, 2007; Gardner, 2007; Gardner & Barnes, 2007).

Despite disciplinary differences, from the literature it is possible to identify three main socialization activities that are crucial to all graduate students: 1) finding and building an advisor relationship, 2) holding teaching assistant (TA) or research

assistant (RA) duties, and 3) performing scholarly obligations. These activities will be the focus of the study, though review of the data did show that the list of activities needed to be expanded. The study looks specifically at funding and TA duties; tension between research and teaching as well as PhD students' transition to research; general scholarly obligations, including learning to write and present for the field; finding and building a relationship with an advisor; the role of peers; and the job market and career goals. It is clear that advisor relationship is perhaps the most important factor in a graduate student's success (Lovitts, 2008). Other work shows the importance of sources of funding, and therefore the ability to perform TA or RA duties (Nettles & Millet, 2006). Finally, performing scholarly obligations includes the concept of intellectual mastery (Golde, 2005), which is clearly important in any educational endeavor, and learning the disciplinary norms of scholarship (e.g. presenting at group meetings or seminars, working on articles for publication). The research will center on non-native English speaking graduate student experiences of each of these components of graduate school.

Socialization is actually an institutional process. The link between institutional theory and its processes and carriers is essential to this work; I use the term socialization to refer to a process of institutionalization that students must navigate (Scott, 2008, p. 191-192; Fogarty & Dirsmith, 2001). Scott (1987) points out the necessity of identifying paths through which institutionalization occurs. Zucker's (1983) definition, "institutionalization operates to produce common understandings about what is appropriate and, fundamentally, meaningful behavior" (p. 5) is appropriate to the consideration of graduate student professional development. Furthermore, institutionalization is "the social process by which individuals come to accept a shared definition of social reality... is taken for granted as defining the 'way things are' and/or the 'way things are to be done'" (Scott, 1987, p. 496). Barley and

Tolbert (1997) contends that scripts, or behavioral regularities, are the link between institutions and individual or collective action.

Institutional theory is a valuable lens through which to consider the problem because of the way it captures and characterizes the external forces surrounding organizations. Specifically, it will be useful in consideration of the outer circle of Figure 1: What are the forces shaping graduate education? Institutional theory is commonly used to consider educational settings (Sine, Tolbert & Park, 2007; Kim, 2004; Rowan & Miskel, 1999; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996; Rowan, 1982; Meyer & Rowan, 1978): it helps explain why universities look so consistent despite individual differences, as well as the social and political powers that shape them.

Specific tenets of institutional theory are relevant here: Scott's (2008) pillars of institutions, as well as the concepts of decoupling, legitimacy, isomorphism, organizational response to institutional forces (Oliver, 1991), and institutional uncertainty (Goodrick & Salancik, 1996). The research will treat institutionalization as a process. If we look again at Figure 1, institutional theory can help explain why external messages affect or do not affect the formal structure of universities. Scott (2008) defines institutions:

Institutions are comprised of the regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life. (p. 48)

In other words, institutions are made up of rules, norms, and taken for granted elements. Such a framework is relevant to the consideration of universities.

Institutional theory will be reviewed in great detail in Chapter 2.

English language proficiency clearly affects students' participation in the socialization process, as well as the way in which the organization may try to socialize

students, though it is not clear in what ways. Socialization is the process through which people learn what they need to know in order to succeed in an organization; clearly students must learn to read, write and present their work in a way that conforms to the standards of their field. In such a way, English language skill development is really part of the professional socialization of graduate students. This study will fill a void in the research by examining the ways that socialization is affected by English language proficiency.

Language ideology will enable a consideration of the institutional forces related to English language proficiency, as well as the interaction between English language proficiency and the socialization of graduate students. Attitudes about English language proficiency may fall into the rules, norms and deeply-embedded patterns of logic covered by institutional theory, but it is important to distinguish language ideology separately in this case to enable a focus on language. While most language ideology work does not focus on graduate students, key elements of it are relevant here. The literature questions the supremacy of English, and challenges notions that are largely taken for granted in the general higher education literature. Looking at the experiences of graduate students from this perspective allows for a more complete examination of the institutional forces at play in the learning and not learning of English, and the complexities of being a non-native English speaking graduate student.

Woolard (1998) defines language ideology as “representations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world” (p. 3). She points out that language ideologies “underpin not only linguistic form and use but also the very notion of the person and the social group, as well as such fundamental social institutions as religious rituals, child socialization, gender relations, the nation-state, schooling and law” (p. 3). According to Reagan

(2002), language “plays a number of key roles in the distribution of social benefits... it is the communicative glue that holds society together, and it also often functions as a marker of social class and ethnic identity” (p. 2).

Applications of language ideology to educational settings explore the challenges that non-native English speakers face. Valdez, González, Lopez Garcia, and Marquez (2003) contend that such ideologies contribute to the “not learning” of foreign languages: “the character of professional fields as well as the culture of academic departments interact in important ways in the transmission of the broader culture values that lead to the learning and not learning of particular subjects” (p. 4). Non-native speaking graduate students get conflicting views about the importance of the English language. Students may get the message that they are inferior if they do not speak English well, but they may also get the idea that English classes or the English language are not important, especially when compared with research demands. Moreover, there are dominant myths (Pennycook, 1998) associated with the learning of English that stigmatize students who struggle to develop their skills, reveal a general lack of knowledge about what it takes to achieve an advanced level of proficiency in a foreign language, and perpetuate negative attitudes about non-native speakers.

Such attitudes, as well as the way they interact with institutional forces shaping graduate schools and impacting graduate students, will be the focus of the study. It is important to note here some important elements that will not be the focus of this study. I am not specifically focusing on second language acquisition or on the learning of English, nor will I focus on identity. Some insights from work on second language acquisition that considers social forces may be useful in understanding the context of this problem (Norton, 2000), but this will not be a project focused on linguistics, applied linguistics or the learning of English. It will look at the impact of perceived

English language proficiency on students, departments, and the larger university system. Similarly, the way language learners negotiate their identity in a new language will not be emphasized. For example, Norton (2000) argues that “it is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time, and it is through language that a person gains access to- or is denied access to- powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak” (p. 5). Similarly, González (2001) states “language is at the heart, literally and metaphorically, or how we are, how we present ourselves, and how others see us” (p. xix).

My work focuses on the second parts of these statements: access to social networks, participation in the larger system, how students present themselves, and how others see them. Negotiating a sense of self, and other aspects of identity formation, while important, are not directly related to my research. Moreover, my work will take for granted the role of English in graduate student socialization (Just to be clear, it does not assume the supremacy of English. By this I mean that the English language is necessary in the graduate school context, but is not better than other languages in general). It will consider issues related to English language proficiency as they relate to broader issues and the external forces affecting the larger system of graduate school and higher education.

Therefore, the research will make connections between institutional theory, the process of socialization, and tenets of language ideology to explore the complexities that non-native English speaking graduate students face and the repercussions for the system of graduate education in the U.S.

#### Selected Universities and Departments

The names of the universities will not be disclosed because of IRB requirements at both schools; the pseudonyms Eastwood and Westfield will be used.

The selected universities are appropriate sites for this comparative study for several reasons. They are both highly competitive, private, tier 1 research universities. Despite some differences, they tend to benchmark against each other, and have similar demographics. Their graduate schools function in much the same way: both universities are readily described as decentralized. Eastwood University's current enrollment is about 20,000 with approximately 6,000 graduate and professional students. In the Graduate School about 45% of students are international (retrieved from university website). Westfield University's current enrollment is about 20,000 with about 12,000 graduate and professional students. The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences is 35% international (retrieved from the university website). The international population at both schools has similar demographics as well: the top countries of origin are China, India and South Korea.

Both universities have English language proficiency requirements for international teaching assistants (ITAs), though Eastwood has a more developed program and a more clearly stated policy than Westfield. Because of the nature of the research questions, it made sense to study a university where there were specific messages and policies directed towards international graduate students. In this case, Eastwood has more specific messages than Westfield.

The economics departments at both universities will be the focus of the study. Economics was chosen largely because of its international nature, as well as its position as a social science with a very broad spectrum of subfields, from theoretical to applied. It is also a highly quantitative field. I selected the economics departments based on their compatibility in size, ranking, percentage of international students, and funding sources, as well as their willingness to participate in the research. The expectation was that consistency in such factors will equate to consistency in external forces. I looked at department demographics, and talked to deans at both graduate



schools to gauge their opinion about which departments might be willing to participate, as well as which ones graduate school administrators might be particularly interested in learning more about. Looking across them at each of the aforementioned factors (size, ranking, percentage of international students, and funding sources), economics became the preferred department. More information about the environment at both universities and in both departments will be presented in Chapter 4.

### Research Design

Because of the understudied nature of the subject, the study utilized a qualitative case-study approach (Patton, 2002), in which the cases are both multilayered and nested (disciplines, universities, departments). Robert Yin (1984) terms this approach a multiple case replication design: in this case the study will be replicated on two departments at two different universities in order to get at each layer of Figure 1.

At the moment very little is known about how institutional forces affect non-native speaking graduate students: an exploratory study is needed. The data gathered in this study may prove valuable for future survey design. The study follows a departmentally-based design that has been used in other studies to consider graduate student and university issues (Mills and Hyle, 2001; Weidman & Stein, 2003; Golde, 2005; Mendoza, 2007; Louis, Holdsworth, Anderson & Campbell, 2007; Gardner, 2007; Lovitts, 2008).

The study consists of two main parts: gathering data on the universities, selected departments, and disciplines, and conducting interviews with selected administrators, faculty and students. The rationale for study at the disciplinary and department level is supported by previous work and common views on graduate education. The disciplinary orientation cuts across all layers of university

organization: as Kuh (2003) quotes Clark (1985), “Many faculty members, particularly those at prestigious institutions, have a stronger allegiance to their discipline and national network of peers than to their employing institution” (p. 279). As Golde (2005) points out in his study on graduate student attrition, graduate school “is local, because it is centered in an academic department, and it is national because the department is the local manifestation of a discipline” (p. 671). Again, Figure 1, previously shown, attempts to represent the relationship between these elements.

Within each departmental case chosen, I follow two paths of inquiry, as depicted in Table 1 and demonstrated by the research questions. I look across the different levels of analysis (university, department/discipline, and students) to see what can be understood about specific graduate student responsibilities from the perspective of institutional theory and language ideology. I look for the affect of institutional forces and language ideology forces on the graduate school socialization process, specifically, finding an advisor, forming a committee, working (TA or RA duties) and other potential scholarly expectations. Please see Table 1. I show it again and go over it in more detail in Chapter 3.

Table 1: Research Design

<b>Theoretical Approach</b>	<b>Levels of Analysis</b>			
	<b>University</b>	<b>Department/ Discipline</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
<b>Institutional Theory</b>	How do university rules, norms, and deeply embedded patterns of logic shape NNSGS* experiences?	How do department and disciplinary rules, norms and deeply embedded patterns of logic shape NNSGS experiences?	How do students navigate and influence such a system?	Sensitizing concepts from Institutional theory: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pillars (regulative, normative, cognitive)</li> <li>• Decoupling</li> <li>• Institutional uncertainty</li> </ul>
<b>Language Ideology</b>	How do university attitudes about English language proficiency shape NNSGS experiences?	How do department and disciplinary attitudes about English language proficiency shape NNSGS experiences?	How do students navigate and influence these attitudes about English language proficiency?	Sensitizing Concepts from Language Ideology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard language ideology</li> <li>• What it means to speak English well</li> <li>• Complexities of learning a language</li> <li>• Conflicting views on importance of English</li> <li>• Mutual responsibility</li> </ul>
<b>Design Component</b>	Two competitive, peer universities	2 economics departments		
<b>Data Collection Methods</b>	Document analysis Interviews with administrators and NNSGS	Document analysis Interviews with faculty and domestic graduate students and NNSGS	Interviews with NNSGS	

\*NNSGS= Non-native English speaking graduate students

Before getting in to each of the specific theoretical propositions, I will present

an overview of the data and some preliminary answers to my research questions. How students in both departments talk about their experiences finding and building a relationship with an advisor, working and performing other scholarly obligations, as well as other themes that come out in each department will be presented and discussed in Chapter 4. While the theory is guiding the work, it is important first to understand what is going on in each department from the perspective of both administrators and students. Then in Chapters 5 and 6 I will use the theoretical lenses to interpret what is happening in each of the departments with a specific focus on propositions derived both from the theory and my experience and expectations working in similar environments.

### Propositions

I have derived eight main propositions for the research from prior work and theoretical expectations. In Chapter 2 I will present a thorough review of the literature and explain how each of these propositions was derived. Briefly, three of the propositions arise from tenets of institutional theory. These propositions could be applied to graduate school in general, and are not specific to non-native English speaking students. They address specific tenets of institutional theory: the pillars of institutions, decoupling, and institutional uncertainty.

1. Graduate school experiences are shaped by identifiable regulative, normative, and cultural cognitive elements; normative and cultural cognitive elements are likely to be more influential than regulative elements.
2. Departments and graduate students are more responsive to departmental and disciplinary expectations than to general university expectations.
3. Graduate school administration is decoupled from departments.
4. The graduate school student experience is an uncertain institutional environment.

Consideration of relevant tenets of language ideology prompts four propositions. They address standard language ideology, the complexities of learning a foreign language, accent, what it means to speak English well, conflicting views about the importance of English and the concept of mutual responsibility in communication. These propositions are directly focused on perceptions of English language proficiency, and are therefore specific to the consideration of non-native English speaking graduate students.

1. Non-native speaking graduate students encounter differential treatment in their experiences.
2. Even students who do not seem to struggle with English language proficiency may have trouble identifying and understanding the norms and rules that are part of successful socialization.
3. English language proficiency expectations are higher for students in more applied fields.
4. Non-native English speaking graduate students currently bear the communicative burden in their graduate school experiences.

#### Implications

The topic of international graduate students in graduate programs in the United States is complex. This research is invaluable to graduate school administrators as well as educators interested in a more complete understanding of the experiences of non-native speaking students in American institutions. Such understanding is crucial given university dependence on international graduate students, their high enrollment, and an awareness of the resources that they bring to American campuses.

A related corollary here is Skorton's (2008) concern about "U.S. students' long-standing inability to communicate in any language other than English" (p. 58). The perception that an international, multicultural environment is beneficial for

American students is widespread, but it is unclear how such benefits play out. If large numbers of international students are studying at US universities, but not interacting harmoniously with domestic students, or largely keeping to themselves, where is the social benefit? It is clear that there is a research and innovation benefit for US universities, but more attention needs to be paid to other aspects of international graduate student experiences in the US. In order to foster the strongest graduate school system possible, more information is needed about the challenges non-native speaking graduate students face and the way that their socialization experiences occur at U.S. universities. The results of the study will speak to this issue; more needs to be done to ensure that universities are making the most of the resources they have.

In the next chapter I review the literature relevant to the study, in Chapter 3 I go into more detail about the methodology used, and in Chapter 4 I lay out the findings that will form the core for the analyses in Chapter 5 (Institutional Analysis) and Chapter 6 (Language Ideology Analysis). In Chapter 7 I discuss the areas of overlap of both theoretical lenses, the value of bringing these different fields together, and the implications for both theory and practice.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

How can we think about the complex range of issues that non-native English speaking graduate students face? They are tied up in organizational issues of graduate school and attitudes about English language proficiency. The factors affecting students' everyday experiences using English in graduate school are related to their own production and approach to the language as well the multiple, and sometimes conflicting external forces that impact them. As the conceptual framework demonstrates, graduate student socialization is the vehicle through which to view the forces: institutional theory allows for an organizational consideration of such forces, and language ideology brings to light the challenges of being a non-native English speaker studying in the United States. Recall Figure 2.

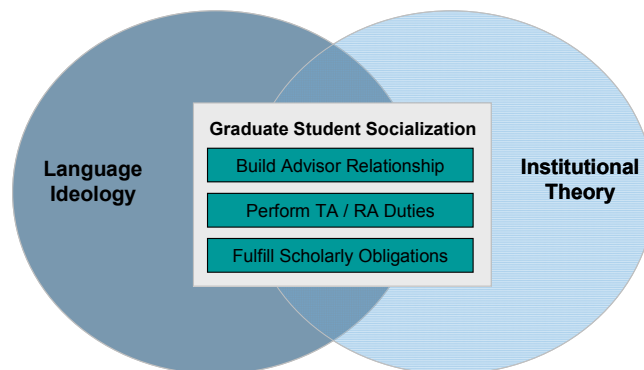


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

In this chapter I will review the literature, highlight relevant aspects of each component of the framework and explain how they prompt the research propositions.

## Graduate Student Socialization

Regardless of services or training offered, universities have normative expectations of all graduate students. Despite cultural or language differences, they should serve as research and/or teaching assistants, they should participate actively in classes and departmental activities, and they should build their academic skills and professional networks. Such expectations are part of the dominant theoretical framework used to consider graduate school: socialization, which is the process whereby “the graduate student acquires the skills necessary for entrance to and success in the professional milieu” (Gardner & Barnes, 2007, p. 371). Students are expected to have such duties as preparation for future faculty positions. As many scholars, including Bieber and Worley (2006) point out, graduate school is built on the apprenticeship model, which “assumes that a graduate student/apprentice will be socialized into the profession by a mentor in graduate school” (p. 1010).

A review of the graduate student socialization literature reveals a view that graduate education in general serves a socialization purpose. There is a dual socialization process occurring: students must learn how to be graduate students, but graduate school itself is part of anticipatory socialization to the faculty career (Tierney, 1997; Mendoza, 2007). In such a way, graduate students must learn the field-specific behaviors that will help them succeed as scholars in their selected disciplines (Mendoza, 2007) outside of the universities in which they study. According to Swales (2008), for non-native English speaking students the term should be triple socialization: learning how to be a graduate student, what is expected in the faculty career, and how to navigate those tasks in a foreign language, in a foreign country.

Much socialization research has looked at the role of the discipline in student experiences. Gardner (2007) looked at whether graduate students in chemistry and



history undergo similar socialization processes. Golde (2005) also looks at discipline and departmentally-based standards. Mendoza (2007) points out that “significant differences in terms of norms and practices exist across the hard-soft and applied-basic spectrum of research” (p. 74). Moreover, Nettles and Millet (2006) argue that the “historical and cultural norms of a discipline often determine the style and type of scholarly productivity” (p. 29). The current research will also attempt to get at potential disciplinary differences, and how they connect with ideas about English language proficiency, and how they may or may not relate to the university. Despite disciplinary differences, from the literature it is possible to identify the main socialization activities that are crucial to all graduate students. Initially the research examined the finding of and building a relationship with an advisor, working (TA/RA duties) and other scholarly obligations. Review of the data shows that while these three elements are important, each element should be expanded. In total the research will look at these key experiences: the funding and TA duties of a graduate student, the tension between research and teaching as well as PhD students’ transition to research; general scholarly obligations, including learning to write and present for the field; finding and building a relationship with an advisor; the role of peers; and the job market and career goals.

English language proficiency clearly affects the ways students engage in these activities. Students do not engage in these activities in isolation; they may learn from their peers or take cues from their departmental environment as they go about learning how to perform these tasks. Tierney (1997) argues that socialization is the process through which people learn what they need to know in order to succeed in an organization; English written and oral communication skills clearly fall into the category of what students need to know. While the focus on socializing students to be scholars is on the dissertation (Lovitts, 2008), clearly students must learn to interact

with their advisors, fill their positions as TAs or RAs and read, write and present their work in a way that conforms to the standards of their field. As Kuwahara (2008) points out, “a strong command of the language, highly developed verbal skills and good political sense are the basis of communicating in an academic environment” (p. 187). In such a way, English language skill development is really part of the professional socialization of graduate students, though it has not been studied in that way specifically. Research on the ways that socialization is affected by English language proficiency (or non-native speaker status) is needed: this study will fill such need. Institutional theory allows for a broader organizational consideration of the socialization process, whereas language ideology enables a concurrent examination of attitudes about English language proficiency and their potential impacts.

### Institutional Theory

Institutional theory is the appropriate organizational lens through which to view graduate student socialization because of the way it captures the impact of the external environment. As Lovitts (2008) points out:

Graduate education is about providing the knowledge workers who ensure the ultimate success and survival of all the major institutions of society by preserving, creating and developing the ideas, information and technology necessary for them to persist and advance. (p. 297)

Lovitts’ words offer a clear connection with institutional theory, which captures the way organizations maintain and extend prevailing societal norms. What is not clear from Lovitts’ statement, that those interested in international students and aware of the current demographics of PhD programs might wonder, is what it means that so many of the knowledge workers charged with the success and survival of the major institutions of society are not from the United States. As mentioned in the introduction, the decline of American innovation is a problematic issue. In any case,

in this section I will give an overview of institutional theory, elaborate macro and micro institutionalism, explain the use of institutionalization as a process, and highlight particular elements of the theory that inform the research.

### *Definition and Overview*

Institutional theory has its origins in the late 1940s, in the work of Merton, Selznick, Parsons, and Simon and March (Scott, 2000). Selznick is widely credited as being the grandfather of institutional theory (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006), though Scott (2008) points out that many sociologists are somewhat overlooked in the history. Institutional theory was one of several theories that began at this time, to counteract classical management theory's focus on the internal functions of an organization. The work marked the beginning of an awareness that "organizations adapt, not only to the strivings of their internal groups, but to the values of external society" (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006, p. 85).

Selznick (1957) said that to institutionalize means to "infuse with value beyond the technical task at hand" (p. 17). He argued that as organizations become more value-laden they reflect the identity of the community, and the technical significance of organizations weakens. Others built on such ideas to form a theoretical area that would cast a very wide net: institutionalism. In order to proceed, it is necessary to consider the definition of institutions.

Scott (2008) defines institutions:

Institutions are comprised of the regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life. (p. 48)

The regulative pillar focuses on the rules, policies and procedures that are legally based. The normative pillar places social obligation and expectations as the basis of

institutions. Normative forces are not legal as much as they are moral, or thought of as being the way people should behave. Finally, the cultural cognitive pillar represents the unconscious part of an institution. Such elements are those that are taken for granted to be part of the organization; they are so much a part of the organization that they may not even be considered or questioned.

Such a foundation informs Sipple's (1999) definition of an institution: "a socially defined purpose around which normative, cognitive, and regulative structures emerge to provide stability and meaning to social behavior" (p. 451). Scholars may emphasize or favor one pillar of institutions over another, depending on their perspective, because sometimes the pillars may actually be in conflict, but the overall classification of institutions as regulative, normative or cultural cognitive has also been used to study forces surrounding educational settings (Sipple, 1999).

In the current study, all three pillars are relevant in the consideration of the student-advisor relationship, TA/RA duties (hereafter referred to as "work"), and scholarly responsibilities. Having an advisor is a regulative institution in graduate school, but clearly the way the relationship develops is normative or even cultural-cognitive. Faculty may take for granted that students will learn how to navigate expectations on their own: there are not formal rules for how to interact with an advisor. Considering work and scholarly responsibilities, students have to figure out how much of their jobs are regulative (what is formally required) and how much is expected but perhaps not officially stated. As Lovitts (2007) points out, much of what is important to know as graduate students is not explicitly stated. Formal requirements take a back seat to normative or even cultural-cognitive expectations. At the same time, the institution would not persevere without key regulative elements.

Proposition 1: Graduate school experiences are shaped by identifiable regulative, normative, and cultural cognitive elements; normative and cultural

cognitive elements are likely to be more influential than regulative elements.

### *Macro and Micro Perspectives*

Distinguishing the macro and micro perspectives of institutional theory is relevant to the current study because of the different focal points of the perspectives. Macro and micro boundaries are related to the distinction between institutionalization as a state or as a process. Scholars interested in institutional change, like Zucker, argue for a more careful consideration of the specifics that go on within an organization, and against the treatment of “institutionalization as a black box” (p. 105), which can occur in macroinstitutionalism. Hirsch and Lounsbury (1997) reinforce that macroinstitutionalism is externally oriented and focused on the influence of the environment, whereas the micro perspective is internally focused in its attention to the particularities of specific organizational actions in response to the environment. Zucker (1987, 1991) makes a strong argument for the consideration of microfoundations of institutional theory.

In Zucker (1987), she names two theoretical approaches: environment as institution and organization as institution. Her characterization aligns with the macro (external) or micro (internal) approach. Zucker (1987) argues that the macro perspective results in decoupling and inefficiency, while the micro perspective explains organizational stability. Zucker’s categorization addresses the conflict some scholars have noted with using institutional theory to explain both persistence and homogeneity (Dacin, Goodstein & Scott, 2002).

In her 1991 article Zucker further elaborates on four main distinctions of microinstitutionalism. She argues that institutionalization is a continuous rather than a binary variable: it is a process rather than a state. She claims that macroinstitutionalism has a tendency to focus on irrationality rather than “potential efficiency gains” that can arise from routines that are easily repeated, transmitted and

maintained over time (p. 104). She also points out that the macro perspective makes it difficult to distinguish between resource dependence theory and institutionalization. If institutionalization is a black box, one cannot examine the specific rationales behind it. Moreover, she cautions against complete focus on organizational homogeneity because “direct investigation of transmission and maintenance processes yields insights into the variability of organizations’ strategic responses to similar institutional environments” (p. 105). Finally, she points out that the micro approach allows for a consideration of deinstitutionalization.

Furthermore, from the macro perspective, the environment is the institution. In the current study, the institutions at play would be the forces acting on elite universities. Building on this perspective, the norms of graduate school come from the broader environment and the external pressures acting on universities. Such institutions would include speaking English, finding an advisor and forming a committee, performing TA or RA duties, conducting research, and building professional or career qualifications.

On the other hand, from the micro perspective, the organization as institution, the universities are the institutions. Zucker (1987) explains that from the organization as institution approach, “implemented institutional elements commonly arise from within the organization itself or from imitation of other similar organizations” (p. 446). Clearly there is some overlap between these perspectives, especially if one can agree that the universities under study are similar. While the pressures that act on both schools might still be comparable, the micro perspective allows for a more internal consideration of specific characteristics of each school.

The distinction between the micro and macro perspective is also related to the tension between structure and agency. In the current case, does the organization have all the power in shaping forces that affect students, or do students also have some

power? As Scott (2008) points out, “the thrust of institutional theory is to privilege continuity and constraint in social structure, but that need not preclude attention to the ways in which individual actors take action to create, maintain, and transform institutions” (p. 76). According to Giddens (1984), structure is more important than action, and structure has constraining as well as enabling properties. Structuration theory and his concept of the duality of structure are relevant to the macro and micro foundations of institutional theory. Giddens argues that routine is an essential concept for the individual, as well as to the continued reproduction of the institutions of society. Individuals enjoy familiar routines, while routines also contribute to the stability and legitimacy of social institutions. Although individual actors have agency, or “the ability to have some effect on the social world-- altering the rules, relational ties, or distribution of resources” (Scott, 2008, p. 77), the social whole is more important than the individual parts (Giddens, 1984).

The duality of the research questions in this case (exploring both a university to student and student to university perspective) is intended to acknowledge the power that individual actors may have within the institutional environment. Scott (2008) identifies different categories and levels of actors responsible for institutional creation: the nation-state, the professions, associations, other elites, marginal players, social movements, and rank-and-file participants. Such categorization may be useful for the consideration of the forces acting on non-native English speaking graduate students. As Scott (2008) points out, “institutions are not only constructed from the top down, but from the bottom up” (p. 103).

The macro and micro perspectives are largely complementary (Zucker, 1991). Both perspectives are relevant and offer valuable lenses for the consideration of graduate student socialization within the chosen universities, disciplines and departments of this study. Specifically, the tenets of institutional theory relevant to

the study of non-native English speaking graduate students at two universities are isomorphism, decoupling, legitimacy, and institutional uncertainty.

### *Isomorphism*

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) contend that isomorphism is a force on organizations within the same field to adopt legitimate forms and processes. Other studies have reinforced the connections between isomorphism and legitimacy (Deephouse, 1996). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identify three types of isomorphism, coercive, mimetic and normative. Guler, Guillén and Macpherson (2002) look at the actors responsible for the different types of isomorphism in the international diffusion of organizational practices. Mizruchi and Fein (1999) argue that DiMaggio and Powell's (1985) article has become socially constructed within the fields of sociology and organizational behavior to favor mimetic isomorphism. The current research will examine the viability of all three types of isomorphism. While DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) propositions are old, and their generality has been challenged (Goodrick & Salancik, 1996; Sipple, 1999), each element of their framework has clear relevance for the current study.

Coercive isomorphism is a consequence of "both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations on which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 150). Rowan (1982) adds to the evidence for coercive isomorphism in school systems. He found that schools tend to add and subtract administrative positions based on prevailing norms. He states that "school structures tend to reflect current institutionalized beliefs about what structures are most appropriate" (p. 260). An important piece of this argument is that external forces can determine not only the creation, but also the elimination of structures. Rowan (1982) contends that "structures that lose the support of institutional environments are neither adopted nor retained by



local school systems” (p. 261). Schools are sensitive to normative standards set externally (Rowan, 1982). While universities are clearly not the same as schools, they are also subject to many external forces and they have multiple stakeholders. Mendoza (2007) specifically focuses on the pressures that external research funding puts on departments, whereas other works look at the pressures that those advocating for undergraduate education put on graduate teaching assistants (Mills & Hyle, 2001). Understanding which external pressures are affecting universities, departments and students and how is an important component of the study.

At the same time, universities might also be responding to what DiMaggio and Powell (1983) call mimetic isomorphism. Within the organizational field of competitive universities, much interest is paid to what the others do. Scott (2000) also considers imitation as a form of legitimacy. He quotes Fligstein (1985): “organizations operate in similar environments and hence watch one another and come to resemble one another independent of considerations of strategy” (p. 156). Do the universities under study really put similar pressures on their students, or are disciplinary and departmental pressures more important?

Finally, normative isomorphism is related to professionalization, or “the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 152). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) contend that professional fields are an important force for isomorphism in their grounding in a particular university discipline and in the scope of the field. Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings (2002) also looked at the role of professional associations and found that they can be powerful agents of legitimating change. In the case of universities, one specific field’s professional organization could potentially affect the curriculum of every department of that field in the country.

Proposition 2: Departments and graduate students are more responsive to

departmental and disciplinary expectations than to general university expectations.

In contrast, Kraatz and Zajac (1996) found that liberal arts colleges did not always comply with the isomorphic predictions of the macro perspective on institutional theory. Upon looking into the organizational specifics of different colleges, they pulled apart what Zucker might call the black box of isomorphism. Particularly, liberal arts colleges did not always change to mimic peer, or more prestigious, institutions. Scott (2008) contends that their study does not show a weakness in institutional theory so much as an alternative institutional logic: “their study depicts the undermining (delegitimation) of one institutional logic- the virtues of the liberal arts-and its gradual replacement by a second- embracing market-oriented institutional logics” (p. 197).

Such findings align with Sipple (1999). He argues that organizations respond to institutions depending on their own unique context. “Organizations do not simply conform to institutional pressures by adopting accepted structures and functions to increase legitimacy” (Sipple, 1999, p. 481). He is quick to point out that the effects he saw in the local context of Michigan might not occur in another state. Bridwell-Mitchell (2007) made a similar argument in her examination of teacher adoption of education reform in New York State: “the potential impact of individual actions on organizational responsiveness suggests more attention to member adoption decisions may better illuminate the dynamics of institutional processes” (p. 3). Similarly, it is important to look into the individual characteristics of specific universities to see how they will respond to institutional forces. Micro examination of internal forces acting within both universities will broaden and deepen the understanding of the concept of isomorphism.

While institutional theorists hotly debate the concept and definition of

organizational field (Scott, 2008), DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) definition of it, as well as their classifications of isomorphism are central to the macro perspective of institutional theory. An organizational field is institutionally defined: "those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life" (p. 148). Organizations in the same field interact frequently, tend to have interorganizational structures or coalitions, and should have a mutual awareness of their common enterprise. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that competition, the state or the professions structure organizations into the same field. As Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings (2002) point out, an organizational field "represents an intermediate level between organization and society and is instrumental to processes by which socially constructed expectations and practices become disseminated and reproduced" (p 58). Brint, Riddle and Hanneman (2006) also explore the concept of organizational field in colleges and universities. It is important to the research that the universities under study are part of the same organizational field.

### *Decoupling and Legitimacy*

Organizations have a rationalized formal structure, but one cannot assume that they function according to this structure. As Meyer and Rowan (1977) state, "institutionalized organizations protect their formal structures from evaluation on the basis of technical performance" (p. 357). As Westphal and Zajac (2001) point out, "decoupling can relieve the tension created by the external pressure to change and the desire to avoid disruption to the existing relationships in the organization" (p. 206). Institutional theorists underline the protective quality of decoupling.

Decoupling and legitimacy are strongly related. As Meyer and Rowan (1977) state:

Organizations are driven to incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of organizational work and institutionalized

in society. Organizations that do so increase their legitimacy and their survival prospects, independent of the immediate efficacy of the acquired practices and procedures. (p. 340).

Therefore, universities are driven to implement policies and procedures that will help them gain legitimacy, although how effectively the policies and procedures are implemented may not be important.

The decoupling argument is often used to examine policies and procedures. According to Tolbert and Zucker (1983), “adoption of a policy or program by an organization is importantly determined by the extent to which the measure is institutionalized- whether by law or by gradual legitimation” (p. 22). Edelman (1992) specifically focuses on the way organizations interpret and implement laws. She points out that because organizations construct and institutionalize forms of compliance with laws, they mediate the impact of those laws on society. Again, the argument is related to decoupling. Edelman (1992) uses the term “visible symbols of compliance.” She argues that Civil Rights Law demands such symbols.

Both Edelman (1991) and Westphal and Zajac (2001) contribute to the evidence for micro considerations of the decoupling argument. As Edelman (1991) points out, “the creation of symbolic structures is especially attractive: an organization can point to structural change as evidence of its compliance, without necessarily creating significant change in behavior” (p. 75). Westphal and Zajac (2001) look at the specific characteristics that caused firms to decouple stock repurchase programs. They found that decoupling is more likely when “actors who hold power in the organization... have a political interest in avoiding institutional pressures for change” (p. 220) or when there is already an awareness of the potential for decoupling. When “institutional pressures conflict with the interests of actors who hold power in the organization” (p. 220) decoupling is likely.

Who holds the power in universities? The tension between the power of the

faculty and the administration within universities is a familiar phenomenon. Such tension is also related to the relationship between the individual department administrators and the overall administrators of the university. In this case, the focus is not on specific policies or procedures, but the decoupling argument is relevant in terms of departmental relationships with their universities. Both universities in the study are widely described as decentralized. Both have a central graduate school as an umbrella structure that cuts across multiple colleges and departments. As previously mentioned, faculty like to be in control of their own students, and may resist graduate school policies that interfere with their freedom. Kuh (2003) quotes Clark (1985), “Many faculty members, particularly those at prestigious institutions, have a stronger allegiance to their discipline and national network of peers than to their employing institution” (p. 279). Therefore, faculty may be a stronger force for the socialization of graduate students, especially if they get different messages from their professional organizations and the administration of the university.

Proposition 3: Graduate school administration is decoupled from university departments.

### *Institutional Uncertainty*

Oliver’s (1991) typology of strategic responses to institutional practices provides a potential framework for analyzing the way universities, disciplines and departments respond to institutional forces. She identifies five strategies that organizations may use to respond: acquiesce, compromise, avoid, defy and manipulate. According to Oliver (1991), there are several predictive factors that help determine how an organization will respond to institutional forces: cause, constituents, content, control and context. Basically, response can be predicted by these different forces. In the case of cause, if members of the organization perceive that increased legitimacy will result from acquiescence to a policy, they will acquiesce. If there are

multiple constituents, it is more likely that they will resist the policy. Similarly, if the content of the institutional practice is in line with the organization's goals, organizations are more likely to acquiesce to a policy. In terms of control, Oliver (1991) mentions coercion and diffusion: both types of control tend to lead to acquiescence. With regard to uncertainty, it is less possible to predict the response: acquiescence or avoidance could occur easily.

Goodrick and Salancik (1996) build on the concept of uncertainty. Their framework of institutional uncertainty will be useful for the analysis. They examine the repercussions of institutional uncertainty in hospitals and identify three conditions for institutional standards to be uncertain: when the means to institutional goals are unspecified, the knowledge base for practices is not clear-cut, or the institutional values may themselves be uncertain. Although they were considering hospitals, a higher stakes environment, the conditions for uncertainty also exist graduate school: the goals may be quite vague (students undertake doctoral degrees for a variety of a different reasons), rules for how to proceed through graduate school are not clear cut, and there is some debate over current purpose of graduate education (Gumport, 2005; Mendoza, 2007).

Proposition 4: The graduate school student experience is an uncertain institutional environment.

#### International Students, English Language Proficiency and Higher Education

Having established an organizational context that applies to all graduate students, it is now important to examine how being an international student or non-native English speaker has been considered in the literature. One's scholarly orientation and focus determines the way English language proficiency is considered. Some argue that the problem is simple: international students should learn English. On the other hand, those who question the dominance of English or speak to its

complexities, or who utilize the language ideology lens, can take a view towards English that is not appropriate to the specific context of graduate school. Here I will give an overview of the simplistic characterization of international students in the higher education and graduate student literature. Then, I will define language ideology and examine its main tenets. It is quite valuable in that it enables a concurrent consideration of culture, race, class and gender. Though I will not be specifically focusing on such issues, I know they are relevant, and it is advantageous to use a lens that can accommodate their role. Finally, I outline the ways in which language ideology offers a valuable lens through which to consider the socialization of non-native speaking students in graduate school, specifically with regard to attitudes about English language proficiency.

The higher education literature that does not use the lens of language ideology does not accommodate the complexities that I have seen students, faculty and university administrators experience. At the same time, language ideology usually considers populations that are quite different from international graduate students at elite universities (e.g. children, immigrants). Ultimately, I hope to show that a blending of frameworks is needed. Language ideology brings a much-needed lens to the experience of international graduate students. With some adjustment for the setting, the main tenets of language ideology are essential to the development of a more complete view of the educational experiences and the socialization of international graduate students.

Most of the higher education literature treats international students as students with special needs who also contribute to the diversity of the university. In such literature the international students are a burden, but they provide a valuable benefit: they can help keep American students competitive in the global economy. As such, universities should find ways to benefit from international students. Such work does

not differentiate between levels of English language proficiency or acknowledge the complexities inherent in learning English. Despite considering international students as a burden, it is expected that they will learn to speak English “well.”

For example, Andrade (2006-2007) highlights the understudied nature of international students. She cites Mori (2000): “international students “have always remained one of the most quiet, invisible, underserved groups on the American campus” (Andrade, 2006-2007, p.58). She goes on to say that international students face the same transitional challenges of American students, as well as “a new language, culture, educational system, and sometimes immigration and financial difficulties” (p. 58). Altbach (1991) goes so far as to say there has not been a comprehensive research agenda directed at the study of international students because there is no money in it.

Some highlights of the literature on international students reveal a range of attitudes toward them. Galloway and Jenkins (2005) point out that of the few studies on international students, none look at university administrators’ perceptions. According to their study, English language problems are the most important factor in international student adjustment (though they do not explain what they mean by English language problems). They also contend that there is a large gap between actual problems international students face, and the way faculty and administrators perceive them. They conclude with a quote from Pfaffenroth (1997) “If Americans wish to maintain a global presence and global influence, it is time our institutions of higher education think seriously and systematically about what they want to do with their international students” (p. 7, p. 186). The theme of what to do with international students in order to benefit from them is common. Zhao, Kuh and Carini (2005) state: “a campus cannot simply recruit a critical mass of international students; it must also intentionally arrange its resources so that international and American students benefit



in desired ways from one another's presence" (p. 225). One can only guess what those desired way are.

Higher education researchers seem to either argue for special considerations for international students or ignore their unique characteristics. Arthur's (2004) statement is a prime example of a more patronizing view towards international students: "It is highly presumptuous to expect faculty, staff and other students to effectively interact with international students without adequate resources and training" (p. 6). So all members of the university community should be trained to learn how to interact with international graduate students? Such perspective characterizes international students as a burden that must be handled. At the same time, there are many more international graduate students than undergraduates studying in the U.S., and the general graduate student literature hardly mentions international students; sometimes they are included as an extra category, or mentioned offhand, almost as an oversight. In such a way their unique characteristics are ignored (see for example, Golde, 2005; Lovitts, 2008; Louis, et al., 2007; Bieber & Worley, 2006; Mills & Hyle, 2001; Perna, 2004).

### Language Ideology

So, what happens when students struggle to fill the normative expectations of graduate school because of their English language proficiency, other aspects of their "internationalness," or how others react to them? The question is rife with complexities that relate to worldviews, epistemologies and super-topics like race, gender and identity. A discussion of language ideology facilitates the exploration of such complexities.

Language ideology looks deeper into the impact of factors external to students and their English language proficiency. While most of this work does not focus on international graduate students, elements of it are relevant here. The literature

questions the supremacy of English, and challenges notions that are largely taken for granted in the general higher education literature. Looking at the experiences of non-native English speaking graduate students from this perspective allows for a more complete examination of the forces at play in the learning and not learning of English, and the complexities of doing school for international graduate students.

Woolard (1998) defines language ideology as “representations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world” (p. 3). She points out that language ideologies “underpin not only linguistic form and use but also the very notion of the person and the social group, as well as such fundamental social institutions as religious rituals, child socialization, gender relations, the nation-state, schooling and law” (p. 3). According to Reagan (2002), language “plays a number of key roles in the distribution of social benefits... it is the communicative glue that holds society together, and it also often functions as a marker of social class and ethnic identity” (p. 2).

There is a clear consensus in the literature that language is an instrument of power. According to Tollefson (2002), language is an instrument of control as well as communication. Similarly, Corson (1999) contends that “language is the vehicle for identifying, manipulating, and changing power relations between people” (p. 14). Reagan (2002) points out that “knowledge of a language can be empowering, and the lack of knowledge of a language can be disempowering” (p. 2). He argues that some languages have greater social value than others, depending on the context.

Pennycook (1998) argues that the power issue is related to the history of Colonialism associated with English: we cannot separate English from its colonial history. In his view English will never be a neutral global language of communication. He looks at the perceived superiority of English, the perceived inferiority of those who do not speak it, and the myths associated with this distinction.

Such constructions of Colonialism include that of rational man and irrational woman, clean and dirty, adult and child, cultured and natural, and industrious and indolent. So in extreme terms, English speakers are rational men, who are clean, cultured and industrious. By default, then, the characterization of the other is incredibly pejorative: dirty, childlike, weak and indolent. He couches his argument in the irony of English: “English is both the language that will apparently bestow civilization, knowledge and wealth on people and at the same time it is the language in which they are racially defined” (p. 4).

Pennycook (1998) elaborates on what he sees as a two-sided coin: the superiority of English and the inferiority of other languages. As he says, “while twentieth century liberalism has made overtly racist views about ‘primitive people’ less acceptable, it has done far less to deconstruct the other side of the equation, European superiority” (p. 55). Pennycook quotes Burchfield (1985): “English has become a lingua franca to the point that any literate educated person on the face of the globe is in a very real sense deprived if he does not know English” (p. 136). Many have made efforts to show the superiority of English: it is a “democratic” language with a larger and more complex vocabulary than other languages and a simpler grammar. Some have gone so far as to say that it is not as “annoying” as other languages (Pennycook, 1998).

Pennycook (1998) sums up this superior attitude: “English is a language richer and more complex than any other, a language that allows for better and more precise representations of the world. On the other hand, it is a simple and clear language that is easier to learn than any other” (p. 147). He does not get into what he calls the “extraordinary inaccuracies” and the contradictions inherent in this view of English, but argues that the attitude continues to pervade popular culture and impacts teachers of English and their students.

He goes on to explore the details of the negative characterizations of speakers of other languages. For example, he questions: “why is it, for example, that Chinese students are so frequently and so consistently categorized as passive, rote-learners, whose logic follows a strange spiral pattern?” (p. 161). Such a characterization, which is a common attitude among ESL teachers, inherently casts Chinese students as inferior. They have a strange way of thinking, and lack critical thinking skills. Unfortunately, most ESL teachers likely would agree with this characterization, perhaps not realizing exactly how pejorative it really is. Pennycook’s main point here is that such students are characterized in a fixed (as opposed to dynamic) manner. This point connects back to the initial literature I discussed here. Sometimes even non-native speaking students as a whole are treated as a fixed, static group, regardless of their nationality. Speakers of other languages “are fixed and defined and determined by their cultures, whether this be in the way they write (cross-cultural rhetoric), the way they learn (learning strategies), or in the invitations for them to tell us about their own cultures” (p. 186). In any case, their non-native speaking status makes them inferior to native speakers. As Lippi-Green (1997) points out, making judgments about others or treating them differently because of language use is “the last back door to discrimination” (p. 73).

Proposition 5: Non-native speaking graduate students encounter differential treatment in their experiences.

### *Standard Language Ideologies*

Such issues prompt an explanation of the main ideologies of English. Wiley and Lukes (1996) outline two dominant ideologies related to the English language: standard language ideology and the ideology of English monolingualism, which they also term the immigrant paradigm. Standard language ideology positions speakers of different varieties of the same language within a social hierarchy. Ethnographic

studies have shown that dialect or variety of English is tied to social position (Heath, 1982). On the other hand, the ideology of English monolingualism applies to the views of non-native English speakers who immigrate to the United States and are expected to learn English. Wiley and Lukes (1996) cite Kloss (1971), who outlines the main assumptions of monolingual language ideology. Immigrants are expected to give up their native language as a payment for participation in a new society; they prosper in the new country in exchange for giving up their native language. Under this ideology, preserving the native language is isolating and detrimental to national unity. Tse's (2001) statement is the essence of the ideology of monolingualism: "the English language itself is the glue that holds our society together and this cohesiveness is currently being threatened by multilingualism" (p. 2).

Reagan's (2002) words summarize the significance of both ideologies: "Native speakers of languages of wider communication have a huge advantage over nonnative speakers in their communicative interactions, just as native speakers of more prestigious varieties of the languages of wider communication are disproportionately advantaged over speakers of non-prestigious varieties" (p. 3-4). People make wide-ranging judgments about others based on the way they use language. At the same time, language becomes a form of social capital. As Wiley and Lukes (1996) point out, English language proficiency facilitates "access to education, good grades, competitive test scores, employment, public office, and economic advantages" (p. 515). For the purposes of the consideration of non-native English speaking graduate students, the ideology of monolingualism is the focus.

### *Appropriacy Argument*

A major issue in the consideration of language ideology (both Standard English and monolingualism) in educational settings is what Lippi-Green (1997) calls the "appropriacy argument." This argument can be traced back to Bourdieu's work on

cultural capital: students need to learn the language and the culture of dominance in order to succeed. Linguistic capital, or the status of the language or variety of language one speaks, may similarly determine one's success. Lippi-Green (1997) argues that education policy about language arises from the idea that learning Standard English has more linguistic capital, and is essential for success in society. The main attitude is that schools can "appreciate other languages but keep them in their place" (p. 109).

The appropriacy argument has been widely studied in educational settings: schools should help children development proficiency in English in order to help them be successful. Schools do not question the dominance of English, and it becomes "the language of wider communication." Such an attitude softens the ideas from Pennycook. Educators likely would not recognize themselves as arguing for the superiority of English, they would simply say they were helping students succeed. Lippi-Green (1997) contends that it is a myth that students with other markers of difference can succeed simply by learning English, and we need to think more deeply about what message the educational system is communicating. In her view, most educators do not recognize that the "separate but equal" ideology is a myth.

A vast array of education literature across different age groups explores different elements of the appropriacy argument. Heath's (1982) study is often cited in examinations of varieties of English and the power that they hold in educational settings. Her ethnography of the literacy practices of three neighboring communities with different racial and economic demographics really underlined how different communities can have different ideas about the way language should be used. She argues that children from "mainstream" families are more likely to succeed in school because their early literacy experiences at home prepare them for the tasks they will be asked to perform in school. Heath's early work emphasizes how powerful language

development can be as a marker of social status and identity, and reinforces the role schools have in propagating such status.

Lareau (1987) and Lareau and Horvat (1999) get at similar issues in their examination of black and white family differences, though they do not explicitly focus on language use. Similarly, Delpit (1988) argues that students need to learn the language of power at school. As she states, “if you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring that power easier” (p. 182). From this perspective, speaking English in a certain way is part of the culture. Her argument speaks of the compromise that epitomizes Lippi-Green’s appropriacy argument: learning the rules of home for home and school for school. Another set of literature focuses on this concept: cultural mismatch, which speaks to the commonly recognized tension that students juggle if there is a “mismatch” between their home culture and the culture of the school (Brayboy, 2004; Olsen, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999; Tanaka, 2005). Clearly it is not a simple process for students whose home language and culture differ from the school language and culture. The appropriacy argument simplifies the issue, though it is clear that students do need to learn the language that will equip them with skills for success in society. While knowledge of the language itself may not be enough, without it students have even less of a chance to prosper.

Educational ethnographies have looked at the tension between students from different language and cultural backgrounds (Olsen, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999; El-Haj, 2006). El-Haj’s (2006) ethnography of two distinct schools in the Philadelphia area also speaks to the power of language in schooling. Students who attend a private, college preparatory school expect to learn the language of power. As one teacher at the school points out:

There will be a bias toward that more-traditional canon because it educates kids to a certain culture. And it's also the way you speak. It's the way you interview.... It's also a sense of being comfortable in that culture. Which is a lot of what our students get taught how to do. How to present themselves. How to be articulate about their ideas in language that is familiar to an admissions officer at Harvard. (p. 77)

El-Haj's point is echoed in Reagan (2002). He discusses vocabulary development programs that "provide the client with the 'vocabulary of a Harvard graduate' as a means of improving others' perceptions of them" (p.4). This excerpt from El-Haj's data is telling. Even in an ethnography that is not explicitly dealing with language, it comes out as an issue. It is taken for granted that in order to go to Harvard a student must know how to speak a certain variety of English. There are a lot of taken-for-granted underlying assumptions about what Harvard is, what it means to go to Harvard, and what it means to speak English well.

#### *Complexities of Learning a Foreign Language*

Warriner's (2007) study contradicts the appropriacy argument, and brings in the issue of gender. She studied a group of female Sudanese refugees in an adult ESL program. She wanted to examine how language ideologies and ideas about immigrants influenced student success. Her perspective is that the United States is generally anti-immigrant, that immigrants are expected to learn English to succeed, and that the ESL classroom therefore becomes a "site of cultural politics" (Pennycook, 1998) because English language use becomes an indicator of nationalism. Despite developing their English language proficiency, most of the women in Warriner's (2007) study are unable to get jobs. She points out that one student successfully completed the English course "without any idea how to access community resources or networks that would allow her to translate her knowledge and skills into an entry-level job and wage that would help support her family" (p. 353). The reader can speculate that perhaps this student was being discriminated against because her



English was marked as non-standard. It is also clear that even though language proficiency can be a vehicle for social capital, there are many other factors at play that can help students succeed in a new culture (Kuwahara, 2008). It is important to understand how well these students learned English, and also to point out that simply learning it does not mean that they can change the power relationships that are tied to language, gender and class.

Proposition 6: Even students who do not seem to struggle with English language proficiency may have trouble identifying and understanding the norms and rules that are part of successful socialization.

#### *Unawareness of Native Speakers*

In Nathan's (2005) ethnography of the freshman experience at a large state university, she dedicated a whole section of her analysis to the experiences of international undergraduate students. The criticisms that international students had of American students speak to some of the issues underlying American's views about foreign languages and people from other countries. International students were frustrated and surprised by the stereotypes that Americans held about their countries: there are ninjas in Japan, Swedish people are blond, all Muslims are Arabs, and Indian people ride elephants. The American undergraduates in her study clearly subscribed to superior views of English, and static views of foreigners, that Pennycook (1998) described. As Olsen (1997) points out in her study of a California high school, the mainstream students tended to classify all non native English speakers as "ESLers," without consideration of any of their individual differences.

While Warriner (2007), Olsen (1997) and Nathan (2005) study very different contexts, there is a connection. Non-native speaking students face challenges of ignorance and bias despite their level of English proficiency. Valdez, González, Lopez-Garcia and Marquez's (2003) ethnography of a Spanish department and its

views on language use advance Nathan's argument about the alienation of non-native speaking students on college campuses. They argue that the teaching of foreign languages in the United States is affected by dominant ideologies about foreign language use and the deeply held ideals that foreign languages should be abandoned upon arrival to the U.S. (monolingualism).

Moreover, educational institutions serve to reinforce such ideologies. Most importantly, they point out that "views about non-English languages that are part of American cultural dialogue are maintained and nurtured by educational institutions" (p. 3). Their argument fits in with Reagan's (2002) point that some students do not even view their foreign language class as a "real" class. Valdez et al. (2003) contend that such ideologies contribute to the "not learning" of foreign languages: "the character of professional fields as well as the culture of academic departments interact in important ways in the transmission of the broader culture values that lead to the learning and not learning of particular subjects" (p. 4).

General attitudes about the teaching of languages contribute to students' struggles. At the same time, students may get the message that they are inferior if they do not speak English well, from their department and perhaps even from English language programs. Moreover, there are myths associated with the learning of English that stigmatize students who struggle to develop their skills. In discussions with professors and administrators, they may say things like: the student just needs to watch TV more, or speak more. Such statements and other elements of popular culture (Pennycook, 1998) reveal a general ignorance about what it takes to achieve an advanced level of proficiency in a foreign language. Such statements not only devalue ESL classes, they perpetuate the inferiority or ignorance of non-native speakers.

So, what does it mean to speak English, or to speak English well? Surprisingly, there is very little exploration of this in the literature not directly tied to

second language acquisition. Speaking English is viewed as a static concept. In the U.S. we definitely have the idea that “if you want to get ahead, you have to speak English” (Pennycook, 1998, p. 137). As some literature, like Warriner (2007) shows, speaking English is not necessarily a gateway to success. As Tse (2001) points out, there is a common perception that current immigrants to the U.S. are not learning English, as she writes to disprove such conceptions. She argues that immigrants are indeed learning English. Unfortunately, the arguments end there.

Knowledge of English can be difficult for the layperson to judge, and is a complex topic. Does a student with a large reading vocabulary who struggles to express himself orally know English? What about the student who has very clear pronunciation but lacks the vocabulary to speak across a range of topics? Moreover, if immigrants or non-native speaking graduate students learn English, should they stop speaking their native language? Much of the perception that non-native speakers in the U.S. are not learning English might be because they continue to speak in their native languages. One must make the distinction between learning English and using it.

### *Conflicting views on the Importance of English*

Such ideas have much to say about American monolingualism, but they are also applicable to the learning and not learning of English. Non-native English speaking student get conflicting views about the importance of the English language, and the status of the type of English language classes. From my experience working with international graduate students, it seems that some hard scientists tend to minimize the importance of English: science is often described as having a language of its own. On the other hand, in fields that depend on strong oral and written communication skills, like those in the social sciences, English language ability may be more emphasized.

Proposition 7: English language proficiency expectations are higher for students in more applied fields.

### *Accent and Racism*

At the same time, non-native speakers usually have an accent when they speak English; it is unlikely that they will be able to speak in a neutral way. As seen in the ideology of Standard English, it is problematic to assume that there is a standard or neutral way to speak. Lippi-Green (1994, 1997) has much to say about accent. She argues that sometimes “prejudiced listeners cannot hear what a person has to say because accent, as a mirror of social identity, and a litmus test for exclusion, is more important” (Lippi-Green, 1994, p. 166). Even when students achieve strong proficiency in a second language, their accent can mark them, weakening the role of English as a gateway to success.

Lippi-Green’s (1997) analysis of language use in Disney films underscores the influence of language use on how individuals are perceived. She argues that Disney films use language to demarcate the line between good and evil characters, and the evil characters tend to have foreign accents. She concludes from her findings that “What children learn from the entertainment industry is to be comfortable with *same* and to be wary about *other*, and that language is a prime and ready diagnostic for this division between what is approachable and what is best left alone. For adults, those childhood lessons are reviewed daily” (p. 103). People have to consciously try to overcome the biases about language that were learned and reinforced unknowingly early in life.

Lippi-Green (1997) also examines research that shows that perceptions of English comprehensibility are tied to a person’s appearance. She describes Rubin’s (1992) experiment on students’ perceptions of the comprehensibility of teaching assistants. When listening to the same speech sample, recorded by a native speaker

from Ohio, study participants reported an Asian accent and difficulty comprehending when shown an Asian image; when shown a Caucasian image with the same speech sample, they did not perceive an accent. As Lippi-Green (1997) states, “some students who saw an Asian face were incapable of hearing objectively” (p. 127). In other words, “so conditioned are we to expect a different world view, a different accent, that we hear one where none is present” (Lippi-Green, 1994, p. 225).

Racism clearly plays a role in the consideration of language differences. Pennycook (1998) maintains that racism is part and parcel of Colonialism, and is always tied in to views of non-native speakers. Lippi-Green points out, “accent, when it acts in part as a marker of race, takes on special power and significance” (p. 228). Both Pennycook and Lippi-Green focus on Asian students. As Lippi-Green (1997) argues:

We have a history of dealing with the Asian world as a warehouse of persons and goods available to suit our own purpose and fill our own needs, a practice justified by the supposition that those people are inherently weaker. (p. 227)

Such considerations of race are crucial to the examination of international graduate students, the majority of whom come from Asian countries (COSEPUP, 2005). Lippi-Green (1997) and others have pointed out the problematic use of the term Asian: “The subgrouping ‘Asian’ is internally immensely complex and diverse” (p. 222) and moreover, “*Asian* evokes an association not to national origin, but to race” (p. 225). Because the majority of the non-native speaking graduate student population is from Asian countries, such attitudes about what Asian means are crucial to a consideration of international graduate students.

Diangelo (2006) examines the production of Whiteness in one university classroom and its impact on Asian international students. His work connects to Pennycook and Lippi-Green’s discussion of conceptions of Asians. Diangelo (2006)

points out that “when students of color are also second-language learners, another layer is added to the hierarchical differential in power” (p. 1985). Moreover, “language learners have a complex social identity that must be understood with reference to larger, and frequently inequitable social structures that are reproduced in day-to-day social interaction” (p. 1985). Diangelo shows how universities and teachers have a role in the production of racial climate. “In positioning the international students as culturally deficient rather than exploring how they might have been silenced, the problem is located with them” (p. 1995). He argues that there is a need to understand the way universities produce privilege in order to move toward developing inclusive practices across students and faculty: all of the burden should not be placed on the “different” students.

#### Mutual Responsibility

The key to success for both non-native speakers and other members of the university community is mutual responsibility. In Lippi-Green’s (1997) discussion of the situation with international teaching assistants (ITAs) on college campuses, she laments the lack of communicative burden placed on undergraduate students. Universities have responded to undergraduate complaints by creating ITA programs, but have not made efforts to help undergraduates learn more about language or cultural differences:

There is no parallel recognition of the need to educate undergraduates to discern between real communicative difficulties and those stemming not from language, but from stereotype and bias. (p. 126)

Undergraduates and others from the dominant culture should be expected to share some of the communicative burden. Beykont and Daiute (2002) come to a similar conclusion. They examine international student perceptions of the classroom environment. They explore cross-cultural difference in patterns of classroom

interaction in higher education courses and argue for an increased awareness of different discourse patterns in the classroom: “The multicultural character of higher education classrooms requires, more than ever, that professors and students examine their assumptions about teaching and learning and the nature of discourse in educational forums” (p. 35). They do not assume that international students should adapt to the dominant patterns. In line with Pennycook, they argue for a consideration of the mutual responsibility of the constructions of non-native speakers as deficient. They question whether international students should be expected to adapt to the dominant model of classroom discourse.

El-Haj (2006) also gets at the issue of what can be done to change or challenge dominant views. Learning the dominant language and culture is essential for success, which makes it difficult to challenge the dominant language and culture. Just as Reagan (2002) mentions that judgments about language “reinforce existing power relationships in our society” (p. 4), El-Haj (2006) points out:

Without a concomitant change in institutional culture, educators find that they must teach students survival skills and, in the act of doing so, may reinforce the very structures that require transformation. Moreover, as long as diversity is understood to be a property only of the people marked as different, they bear the burden of change. (p. 85)

El-Haj’s point really underlines the obstacles to changing dominant ideologies. The conversation has not moved far beyond an understanding of the way power relations play out because of language use.

Proposition 8: Non-native English speaking graduate students bear the communicative burden in their graduate school experiences.

#### Summary

So, where do we go from here? It is clear that in current discussions of diversity in educational settings, speakers of other languages are largely ignored. If

one stated goal of most educational institutions is to cultivate diversity, more attention should be paid to the role of foreign languages and foreign language education. Not valuing the education of languages other than English sends the message that English is privileged at the expense of other languages, and also that it is easy to learn. There should be more awareness about the true language of research universities with large numbers of international students. The universities certainly include individuals that speak different varieties of English and languages other than English; we need to be careful with narrow views of what it means to speak English “well.”

International graduate students are not students in danger of losing their native language, nor can they avoid the prominence of English academic communication skills in the professional socialization that is part of the graduate school experience. The expectation that U.S. graduate school is an English medium does not provoke the same sense of deprivation, and does not have to convey a sense of English language superiority. U.S. graduate students are not being asked to abandon their native languages, they are being asked to develop their professional communication skills in English. Clearly their skill development will be marked by aspects of language ideology discussed here, like race and accent, but the role of the English language should not be seen in a negative light. Learning English in graduate school is about professional socialization, but it is tied up in issues of power that arise with language ability.

In conclusion, a theoretical framework for the study of non-native English speaking graduate students at the selected universities should unite the work on graduate student professional socialization, institutional theory, and language ideology reviewed here. Consideration of these elements will help deepen an analysis of non-native speaking students’ navigation of graduate school. Moreover, this work helps bridge current gaps in the literature, addresses the tension inherent in the important



relationship between top U.S. research universities and international graduate students.

Given the theoretical framework, the next chapter will elaborate the methods used in the study. Then, Chapter 4 details the experiences of students at both Eastwood and Westfield, Chapter 5 views those experiences through the lens of institutional theory, and Chapter 6 describes the language ideology specific components of the study. Finally, Chapter 7 integrates the theoretical framework and explains how it all fits together.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

#### Research Design

Guba & Lincoln (1998) underline the importance of a researcher's orientation to her work. "Paradigm issues are crucial; no inquirer, we maintain, ought to go about the business of inquiry without being clear about just what paradigm informs and guides his or her approach" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 218). At the same time, they point out that paradigms are in a state of flux: even proponents of the same paradigm cannot always agree on its specifics. I approach the work from a post-positivist perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Post-positivists believe that reality exists but is "only imperfectly apprehendable because of basically flawed human intellectual mechanisms and the fundamentally intractable nature of phenomena" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). While complete objectivity is impossible, post-positivists do strive to be objective, adhere to externally set standards and look at whether their results fit with existing theory or resonate with their professional community. In contrast with constructivism, for example, I believe that there is a shared reality at the universities in question, and my research has been designed to elicit that reality as it relates specifically to my research questions. While faculty and students may experience their universities, disciplines and departments differently, there are some elements that can be generalized: one can approximate reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Given my post-positivist stance, I use the theory to provide a basis of expectations for the work. The use of theory follows Creswell's (1994) suggestion that it be used inductively in qualitative work "to develop and be shaped through the process of research" (p. 101). Institutional theory and language ideology provide the

theoretical framework for the research in the sense that they inform the work; they are not being tested explicitly. At the same time, the results have the potential to contribute to the theory as well as provide valuable information to the graduate schools at both universities.

My professional experience reinforces the work's foundation and informs the connections I make between theory and real-life situations. I have worked with international graduate students in various capacities at four major research universities. I have designed and taught English language and pedagogy courses for international teaching assistants, and I have worked with students individually to develop their language and communication skills. In addition, I am also a graduate student who has had to navigate multiple university environments. While I am a native speaker of English, I have firsthand experience with the usual challenges that graduate students face. My stance as a post-positivist, my approach to theory and my professional experience all work together to form a solid foundation for my work.

### Case Study Approach

The study uses a qualitative case-study approach (Patton, 2002), in which the cases are both multilayered and nested (disciplines, universities, departments). Yin (2003) points out that case studies are advantageous when “a how or why question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control” (p. 9). Moreover, he defines a case study as an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). Case studies also tend to contain many more variables than can possibly be studied. Clearly all such characteristics pertain to the current research: the case study is the most appropriate strategy.

Specifically, Yin's (2003) multiple case replication design is the most suitable

for this study. Each selected department, the economics department at each university, is a case. As Yin (1984) points out, cases should be selected either because they are expected to show the same phenomena, or because they are expected to produce “contrary results but for predictable reasons” (p. 49). In this study, the cases may produce similar or contrary results, depending on what is revealed about the importance of university affiliation. As Yin (1984) states, “if all the cases turn out as predicted... they would have provided compelling support for the initial propositions. If the cases are in some way contradictory, the initial propositions must be revised” (p. 49). The propositions are expected to hold true for each of the cases equally.

Yin (1984) argues that a rich theoretical framework is essential to a multiple case replication design: it is meant to account for whether particular phenomena are expected to be found or not found. In the current study, the theoretical framework that unites components of graduate student socialization, institutional theory and language ideology performs such a function and accounts for each of the generated propositions. As Yin points out, at the conclusion of the study, the theoretical framework should be revisited and may need to be modified, but it also may be used to generalize to new cases.

At the moment very little is known about how institutional and language ideology forces affect non-native speaking graduate students: an exploratory study is needed. As with other qualitative work, the data gathered in this study may prove valuable for future survey design. While I am not focusing on a specific policy, the study follows a similar design to Mills and Hyle (2001), who evaluated a new policy for TAs at a large state university. They used a case-study (departmentally-based) approach to explore the repercussions of the policy, interviewed faculty and departmental administrators, and discussed applications to organizational theory in their results.

The rationale for study at the disciplinary and department level is supported by prevalent views on graduate education. From the perspective of graduate education, the disciplinary orientation cuts across all layers of university organization: as Kuh (2003) quotes Clark (1985), “Many faculty members, particularly those at prestigious institutions, have a stronger allegiance to their discipline and national network of peers than to their employing institution” (p. 279). As Golde (2005) points out in his study on graduate student attrition, graduate school “is local, because it is centered in an academic department, and it is national because the department is the local manifestation of a discipline” (p. 671).

### Sampling

I use homogenous sampling (Patton, 2002) on the university and department level: it has already been established that the universities are comparable. The universities were chosen for their prestige, their high numbers of international students as well as their dependence on international students. Like other top-tier research universities, both Eastwood and Westfield would struggle to fill positions and maintain their rankings without the presence of international students. Other universities within the same category could have been selected, but the ones under study offered me unique access and research opportunities. In addition to their overall fit with the context under study, I knew I would be able to work and collect data at both schools.

The same department has been selected at both universities so that comparisons can be made with regard to discipline, university and department. While I initially planned to select a science and a social science department, my exploration of the economics department in each university revealed that disciplinary comparisons can be made within the same department. Not only are universities particularly dependent on international students in economics, the field offers an opportunity to

consider the spectrum of work and communicative demands in the subfields of a social science. Some subfields are inherently more applied, like development, labor, and public economics. Others are theoretical in nature, like microeconomic theory, game theory and econometrics. In addition, I realized that focusing on one department at each university would allow me to explore them in more depth, and that the communicative burdens change depending on which subfield a student is studying. Further, sampling from the same discipline helped increase the homogeneity of the sample.

Within the sciences and social sciences, I selected the economics departments based on their compatibility in size, ranking, percentage of international students, and funding sources, as well as their willingness to participate in the research. The expectation is that consistency in such factors will equate to consistency in external forces. I looked at department demographics, and talked to deans at both graduate schools to gauge their opinion about which departments might be willing to participate, as well as which ones graduate school administrators might be particularly interested in learning more about. Looking across them at each of the aforementioned factors (size, ranking, percentage of international students, and funding sources), economics became the preferred department.

Finally, the comparison of cases at two universities makes the data more broadly applicable. Looking for similarities and differences at similar universities prompts the question of how the situation plays out at other universities: sampling from two universities in this case makes the data more interesting and revealing. Does an economics PhD student at one school have a different experience from an economics student at a peer university? Moreover, the design enables an exploration of the strength of disciplinary, university, or departmental affiliation. To summarize, the sample allows me to get at the questions of how administrator, faculty, and student

perceptions of the topic are similar or different within similar departments in the same disciplines at peer universities, and why.

I gathered departmental information, through the process described below, about policies and procedures related to graduate education in order to build my understanding of the expectations of the department (Golde, 2005). Being familiar with the context allowed me to explore some background information on the departments, and enabled me to connect it with information about the disciplines. In addition, it helped me inform the questions I will ask administrators, faculty and students. Table 1 illustrates the connections between the research questions, theoretical approaches, levels of analysis, relevant design components, data collection and analysis methods. The study design intentionally draws these connections to ensure that the research questions can be answered and the propositions can be evaluated. I made every effort to design the data collection instruments to ensure that the findings can inform the research and policy questions.

Table 1: Research Design

<b>Theoretical Approach</b>	<b>Levels of Analysis</b>			
	<b>University</b>	<b>Department/ Discipline</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
<b>Institutional Theory</b>	How do university rules, norms, and deeply embedded patterns of logic shape NNSGS* experiences?	How do department and disciplinary rules, norms and deeply embedded patterns of logic shape NNSGS experiences?	How do students navigate and influence such a system?	Sensitizing concepts from Institutional theory: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pillars (regulative, normative, cognitive)</li> <li>• Decoupling</li> <li>• Institutional uncertainty</li> </ul>
<b>Language Ideology</b>	How do university attitudes about English language proficiency shape NNSGS experiences?	How do department and disciplinary attitudes about English language proficiency shape NNSGS experiences?	How do students navigate and influence these attitudes about English language proficiency?	Sensitizing Concepts from Language Ideology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard language ideology</li> <li>• What it means to speak English well</li> <li>• Complexities of learning a language</li> <li>• Conflicting views on importance of English</li> <li>• Mutual responsibility</li> </ul>
<b>Design Component</b>	Two competitive, peer universities	2 economics departments		
<b>Data Collection Methods</b>	Document analysis Interviews with administrators and NNSGS	Document analysis Interviews with faculty and domestic graduate students and NNSGS	Interviews with NNSGS	

\*NNSGS= Non-native English speaking graduate students



The table provides a summary of the key elements of the study and how they are connected. Institutional theory and language ideology go across the table. Each research question is categorized into its appropriate level of analysis (university, department/discipline, or student) and with which theory it is oriented. The outcomes are the same, and the analysis column shows the tenets of each theory are used to analyze the data. The concepts are present in each of the research propositions as well. The bottom part of the table, design component and data collection methods, are not specifically tied to either theoretical framework, but rather to each level of analysis. In summary, the table shows the relevance of each design decision as well mechanisms in place to manage the analysis.

#### Data Collection

The data collection for this research study consisted of two main parts: document collection of general graduate school information from the universities, selected departments, and disciplines and interviews of selected administrators, faculty and students.

##### *Document Collection*

I first collected information pertaining to international graduate students from the general graduate school information publically available on the official university websites. I looked for information from the graduate schools specific to international and non-native English speaking graduate students, as described below. At both institutions such information can be found from searching through the admissions tab on the respective university home pages. Both university websites then have specific tabs for newly admitted international students that lead to international student English language requirements as well as the international student office. I used the information from these sources as a background for understanding each graduate school's publicly stated approach to international students and likely the first source of

information for international students applying to the university graduate programs. An alternative method of getting to the information is searching from the main university homepage for “international graduate students.” I pursued all of these avenues in order to see what graduate school academic information is available to international graduate students from each of the universities, with the expectation that this is likely the most common information international students will get from each school.

I also examined the information describing graduate study on each of the department’s homepages. I looked at the expectations each selected department sets out for their incoming graduate students, specifically focusing on what is said about students’ expected academic paths: for example, how many semesters of coursework a student is expected to take, committee development and makeup, and expected qualifying or comprehensive exam schedules, and expected paths after graduation. From this information I focus on what is signaled about finding and forming a relationship with an advisor, working, or performing other scholarly obligations. Such data establishes the background for the data collection from the staff and students and provide an initial glimpse into the specific context of each department.

### *Interviews*

I interviewed one graduate school administrator at each university. Both administrators are high-level graduate school deans. Each has extensive experience with international student admissions and student services issues. I gained access to the departments through those graduate school administrators. Then, I interviewed the Directors of Graduate Studies (DGS) in the selected departments. DGSs at both schools are those faculty members who oversee a graduate program or programs.

I conducted in-depth interviews with a graduate school dean at both universities, the DGS of both departments, and second and third year students in each

department. I interviewed students who are in their second and third year of graduate school because such students are not new: they have had time to learn about how things work in their fields. I am interested in those students who are still highly engaged in the navigation of graduate school (Lovitts, 2008), as opposed to those who are preparing to graduate.

At both universities, the economics departments have about 80 PhD students, which means approximately 40 are in their second or third year, and approximately half to one third of those are non-native English speakers. Therefore, while it seems that I am not interviewing a very large proportion of such a large department, what is important is the number of second and third year students. Using this rationale, my goal was to interview about 2/3 of the non-native English speakers who were second and third year students in the department, or approximately 10-12 students. For perspective, I also wanted to interview one or two native-English speaking students.

Table 2: Sampling Rationale and Intended Plan, Graduate Students at each University

Total # of PhD students	Total 2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> year	NNS 2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Final # of interviews (at least 2/3 of total)
~80	~40	~15-20	~10 NNS, 2 NS

The deans at both universities gave me contact information for the non-native speaking second and third year students in the economics departments. I contacted all of the students on the lists, and tried to interview as many as possible. At Eastwood University, there were 24 students on the list, though 5 had relevant data missing or were not reachable, making the total possible 19, and at Westfield University there were 25 students on the list. In terms of native English speakers, I interviewed two at Eastwood and one at Westfield.

I did not plan to focus on students from one particular country: instead I

wanted to interview a sample of students that represented the language make-up of the department. With regard to gender, I attempted to get a sample that is representative of the gender make-up of the department. In both departments, there are many more male students than female students. For each student I interviewed, in addition to language background, I took note of his/her age, and gender. As expected from the demographics of the department, at both schools I interviewed more men than women, and at Westfield I did not interview any women. All the students in the sample are in their mid 20s to early 30s.

Table 3: Actual Students Interviewed, Eastwood University

<b>Student</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Subfield</b>	<b>TA duties?</b>
Peng	China	Male	3	Microeconomic theory	Yes
Li	China	Female	2	undecided	Grading only (did not pass assessment)
Min	China	Female	3	International macroeconomics	No (did not pass assessment)
Pablo	Dominican Republic	Male	3	Microeconomic theory and behavioral economics	Yes
Karim	Turkey	Male	3	Microeconomic theory	Yes
Gang	China	Female	2	Econometrics	Yes
Andres	Mexico	Male	3	Development economics	No (other sources of funding)
Jia	China	Male	3	Econometrics	Yes
Yunjeong	S. Korea	Female	2	Applied microeconomics	Grading only (did not pass assessment)
Raymond	Taiwan	Male	3	Corporate finance	Yes
Keith	U.S.	Male	2	Environmental economics	Yes
Paul	U.S.	Male	3	Development economics	Yes

Table 4: Actual Students Interviewed, Westfield University

<b>Name</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Subfield</b>	<b>TA duties?</b>
Masa	Japan	Male	3	Game theory	Yes (grading only)
Peter	Netherlands	Male	3	Public	Yes
Carlos	Mexico	Male	3	Development and Labor	Yes
Richie	India	Male	3	Finance	Yes
Matteo	Italy	Male	3	Finance	Yes
Pedro	Mexico	Male	2	Microeconomic theory (still partly undecided)	Not yet
Angelo	Italy	Male	3	International Macroeconomics	Yes
John	US	Male	3	Labor and Public	Yes

I organized the interviews in a structured way in order to be able to cover all the topics of interest at first, making sure to leave time in the second part of the interview for whatever other issues the interviewee wanted to discuss. I focused on two main elements in the interviews: perceptions of institutional forces, and attitudes about non-native speakers/ English language proficiency.

The tables below show the interview protocols and how they are connected with the research questions and constructs of interest. I piloted the interview protocols for both faculty and students who are not from the selected departments in order to make sure they elicit the information necessary to answer my research questions. I consulted Patton (2002) as I developed my interview questions, which mainly fall under the broad categories of knowledge and opinion.

Table 5: Interview Protocol for Administrators

<b>Purpose/Construct of Interest</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
Warm-up	What is your perception of current challenges facing graduate education, specifically with regard to the high numbers of international students?
External pressures/ standard language ideology	What pressures do administrators encounter with regard to the preparation of non-native English speaking graduate students?

Table 5: Interview Protocol for Administrators (Continued)

<b>Purpose/Construct of Interest</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
External pressures/ standard language ideology	What pressures do you think non-native English speaking graduate students face?
Standard language ideology	What is your opinion about the role of English language proficiency in graduate student success?
Standard language ideology	What challenges have you encountered working with non-native speaking graduate students?
Background/role of the university	How were the English language support services for international graduate students at this university created?

Table 6: Interview Protocol for Faculty

<b>Purpose/Construct of Interest</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
Warm-up	What is your perception of current challenges facing graduate education, specifically with regard to the high numbers of international students?
External pressures	What pressures do you face as a faculty member in terms of preparing graduate students? From the university? From your discipline (professional organizations)?
External pressures	Talk about pressures that graduate students in your department experience.
Background	Talk about your experiences working with your international graduate students. Describe a particularly successful non-native speaking student. Describe a particularly unsuccessful non-native speaking student.
Standard language ideology	What is your opinion about the role of English language proficiency in graduate student success? Finding and building a relationship with an advisor? Holding TA/RA duties? Performing other scholarly expectations?
Standard language ideology	What challenges have you encountered working with non-native speaking graduate students? Finding and building a relationship with an advisor? Holding TA/RA duties? Performing other scholarly expectations?

Table 6: Interview Protocol for Faculty (Continued)

<b>Purpose/Construct of Interest</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
External pressures/standard language ideology	What challenges do non-native speaking students face? Finding and building a relationship with an advisor? Holding TA/RA duties? Performing other scholarly expectations?
Language ideology	What importance should non-native speakers place on their development of the English language?
External pressures/language ideology	How much time should students spend on ESL classes or other ESL-related activities outside of the department?

Table 7: Interview Protocol for Non-Native English Speaking International Graduate Students

<b>Purpose/Construct of Interest</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
Warm-up	Describe your experience as a graduate student at this university.
External pressures	What has been difficult for you as a graduate student at this university?
External pressures	What pressures do you face? From the department? From your discipline? From the university?
External pressures/standard language ideology	What challenges do you face as a non-native English speaking student? Finding and building a relationship with an advisor? Holding TA/RA duties? Performing other scholarly expectations?
Background	How would you evaluate your own English ability?
Standard language ideology	What is your opinion about the role of English language proficiency in graduate student success? Finding and building a relationship with an advisor? Holding TA/RA duties? Performing other scholarly expectations?
Accent/standard language ideology	Has your English language ability made parts of your graduate student experience challenging? Explain and give examples. Finding and building a relationship with an advisor? Holding TA/RA duties? Performing other scholarly expectations?

Table 7: Interview Protocol for Non-Native English Speaking International Graduate Students (Continued)

<b>Purpose/Construct of Interest</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
Accent/standard language ideology	Do you feel you have encountered any discriminatory treatment because of your status as a non-native English speaker? Finding and building a relationship with an advisor? Holding TA/RA duties? Performing other scholarly expectations?
General	If you could make some suggestions on ways to improve your department, what would you suggest?

Table 8: Interview Protocol for Native-Speaking Domestic Students

<b>Purpose/Construct of Interest</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
Warm-up	Describe your experience as a graduate student at this university.
External pressures	What has been difficult for you as a graduate student at this university? Finding and building a relationship with an advisor? Holding TA/RA duties? Performing other scholarly expectations?
External pressures	What pressures do you face? From the department? From the university (graduate school)?
Complexities of learning a language	What is your experience with foreign language education? How many languages do you speak?
Background	How much do you interact with international students?
Standard language ideology	What challenges have you encountered working with non-native speaking peers?
Standard language ideology	What is your opinion about the role of English language proficiency in graduate student success? Finding and building a relationship with an advisor? Holding TA/RA duties? Performing other scholarly expectations?
Standard language ideology	What challenges do you think non-native speaking students face? Do you think their challenges are unique? Finding and building a relationship with an advisor? Holding TA/RA duties? Performing other scholarly expectations?
Standard language ideology	What importance should non-native speakers place on their development of the English language?
General	If you could make some suggestions on ways to improve your department, what would you suggest?



## Data Analysis

I transcribed some of the initial interviews myself and then I began to use a transcription service. I wanted to get a sense of the initial data as I worked on my interviewing technique, and then with subsequent interviews I had them transcribed externally. I analyzed and coded the data using both sensitizing concepts as well as describing what emerged. I was looking for specific items in the data, but also looking to see what themes would naturally emerge. I used the software ATLAS.ti as a data analysis tool. Each of the propositions is already tied to a particular tenet of the theory, which aided in the creation of sensitizing concepts. In terms of the sensitizing concepts, I looked specifically for themes related to institutional theory and language ideology as specified in each of the research propositions. I looked in the transcripts for any recurrent themes that are not captured by the sensitizing concepts. For example, in this study I was not specifically looking at the role of peers, but through the data I see that peers play a major role in students' experiences and I realized that I would need to discuss and analyze the issue. I analyzed the transcripts for emergent themes and develop codes accordingly. I worked in accord with Patton's (2002) point: "the analyst uses concepts to help make sense of and present the data, but not to the point of straining or forcing the analysis" (p. 457). Because of the expectation of the relevance of the theory, the sensitizing concepts I developed were used to make sense of the data, but what the administrators, faculty and students actually said is most important.

Following is a reiteration of the research propositions as well as the code/construct I will look for in the data. The first six propositions are looking for evidence of pillars of institutions, decoupling, isomorphism and institutional uncertainty from institutional theory.

Table 9: Coding, Institutional Propositions

<b>Tenet of Institutional Theory</b>	<b>Proposition</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Pillars of institutions	1. Graduate school experiences are shaped by identifiable regulative, normative, and cultural cognitive elements; normative and cultural cognitive elements are likely to be more influential than regulative elements.	Normative Regulative Cognitive
Decoupling/ isomorphism	2. Departments and graduate students are more responsive to departmental and disciplinary expectations than to general university expectations.	Isomorphism
Decoupling	3. Graduate school administration is decoupled from departments.	Decoupling
Institutional uncertainty	4. Graduate school is an uncertain institutional environment.	Uncertainty

The data relevant to the institutional propositions, and to answering the first set of research questions (How do university, departmental, and disciplinary rules, norms, and deeply embedded patterns of logic shape non-native English speaking graduate students' experiences? How do students navigate and influence such a system?) are analyzed and discussed in Chapter 5.

Finding evidence that supports or counteracts the remaining propositions is dependent on getting at attitudes about non-native English speakers and English language learning: standard language ideology, complexity of learning a foreign language, accent, what it means to speak English well, and responsibility in the communicative act.

Table 10: Coding, Language Ideology Propositions

<b>Tenet of Language Ideology</b>	<b>Proposition</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Discrimination	1. Non-native speaking graduate students encounter differential treatment in their experiences.	Differential Treatment

Table 10: Coding, Language Ideology Propositions (Continued)

<b>Tenet of Language Ideology</b>	<b>Proposition</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Complexities of learning a language/accent	2. Even students who do not seem to struggle with English language proficiency may have trouble identifying and understanding the norms and rules that are part of successful socialization.	Unwritten rules
Conflicting views about the importance of English	3. English language proficiency expectations are higher for students in more applied fields.	Role of English
Mutual responsibility	4. Non-native English speaking graduate students currently bear the communicative burden in their graduate school experiences.	Responsibility in communication

The data relevant to these propositions and other elements relevant to the second set of research questions (How do university, disciplinary and departmental attitudes about English language proficiency shape non-native English speaking graduate student experiences? How do students navigate and influence attitudes about English language proficiency?) are analyzed and discussed in Chapter 6. Before the analyses, however, it is important to have a picture of the universities, departments and students in this study, which is what is presented next, in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 4

### STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Before delving in to a theoretical analysis of the data, it is important to understand what student experiences look like at both Eastwood and Westfield and to have a sense of the specific challenges and concerns of each department, as well as to know who is involved in the respective cases. How do non-native English speakers experience their programs? What are the most important elements of their navigation of the system? It is important to have an understanding of the environment of the two departments at each university and students experiences in graduate school before tackling the more theoretical questions that will form the focus of Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

So, what are the main components of the graduate student experience at in both programs? Initially the research examined the finding of and building a relationship with an advisor, working (TA/RA duties) and other scholarly obligations. Review of the data shows that while these three elements are important, each element should be expanded. In total the research will look at these key experiences: the funding and TA duties of a graduate student, the tension between research and teaching as well as PhD students' transition to research; general scholarly obligations, including learning to write and present for the field; finding and building a relationship with an advisor; the role of peers; and the job market and career goals. In this chapter, I will describe both universities and departments, introduce the deans, Directors of Graduate Studies (DGSs), and students in the study, and offer their perspectives on each of these main elements the graduate experience.

## Eastwood University

Eastwood University is a highly-competitive Northeastern research university. The current enrollment is also about 20,000 with approximately 6,000 graduate and professional students. In the Graduate School about 45% of students are international (retrieved from university website). Graduate students come to Eastwood from all over the world: the highest percentages of international students are from China, India and South Korea.

Of specific concern for the international, non-native speaking graduate students at Eastwood is the established policy and program for international teaching assistants (ITAs). All graduate students whose native language is not English and who want to hold teaching duties at Eastwood must have their oral English language proficiency assessed. If their levels do not meet the established criteria, students must take a sequence of courses to improve their oral English and may not be permitted to hold teaching duties until they reach the established level. There is an intermediary level in which students are able to hold TA duties but must taken an ITA course concurrently. The policy at Eastwood is only for teaching assistants, and is in no way directed to graduate students in general. If a student does not have to hold TA duties, or manages to hold duties for only one semester without fully reaching the established level of proficiency, the student is then exempt from taking further courses to improve his/her oral English.

I learned about the administrative context of the graduate school at Eastwood from my research on the school and programs, as well as my discussion with an Associate Dean of the Graduate School. The Associate Dean has been at Eastwood for approximately 20 years and with the Graduate School for five years. This dean is the point person in the graduate school for issues related to the English language proficiency of international graduate students. One of the Associate Dean's initial

comments is quite telling; Eastwood is a university striving for excellence on all fronts, and very aware of the importance of maintaining its reputation:

We have to make sure that our faculty is absolutely at the fore, we have to make sure that our structures are at the fore, that our equipment is at the fore, that our knowledge base is at the fore and so that's an ongoing challenge and we want to try to make sure that every grad program is really able to provide the level of excellence that we want it to because it's Eastwood, so that's a challenge too, to keep everything working well and at the highest possible level at all times.

In my interview with the Associate Dean we talked about some of the main concerns facing graduate education, specifically in the Eastwood context. The main areas of interest for the graduate school at Eastwood right now are the constrained economic situation, specifically how it affects funding for graduate students as well as their career prospects, and keeping the graduate school internationally competitive. We also spoke in depth about the specific challenges facing non-native speaking graduate students, the tensions between research and teaching, language expectations for the multiple roles that graduate students hold, and different attitudes about English language proficiency for graduate students.

Another important point in our interview helps set the context of Eastwood: the dean spoke of its level of decentralization, its pride in being a global leader, and the problems inherent therein:

One of the issues that we've become very aware of over here is that structurally I think we've got some problems. Eastwood is in many ways decentralized, I am sure you've heard that expression a lot, and one of the areas of decentralization is around these kinds of language, culture, education issues, and since we don't have a sort of centralized way to provide assistance to those students I think sometimes it's very hard to make sure that everybody is getting training that they need. On the one hand, we want to be a global institution, we want to attract students from all over the world, we want to send students all over the world, but on the other hand, we may not have all of the facilities and structures in place really to make that possible. So there's a little

bit of an imbalance there, and I am concerned that in the current very difficult budget climate, that imbalance may not be able to be addressed as well as we would like at least for the short term.

In sum, Eastwood is a decentralized university, with a policy designed to assess and, when necessary, provide training for international teaching assistants. There is also some concern about how to support the diverse group of graduate students it attracts and enrolls given both fiscal constraint and decentralized governance. How does the context at Westfield University compare?

#### Westfield University

Westfield University is also a highly-competitive Northeastern research university. The current enrollment is about 20,000 with about 12,000 graduate and professional students. The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences is 35% international (retrieved from the university website). Students come to study at Westfield from all around the world; the top percentages of international students are from China, India and South Korea.

I learned about the general context of Westfield from online research about their programs, general observation, as well as my interview with an associate dean in the Graduate School. The Associate Dean has been with the graduate school at Westfield for nearly fifteen years, and before that the Associate Dean worked in other areas at Westfield. The Associate Dean's responsibility is for the academic and social welfare of students.

Westfield has made some changes to its English language proficiency policies for graduate students in recent years. Currently, all international graduate students are expected to reach a minimum level of English language proficiency before being able to hold TA duties. Because all graduate students are expected to teach for at least one semester at Westfield, the university applies the policy to all students, but it is really targeted for teaching. Students are unable to hold TA duties until they have passed the

requirement. At the moment, the requirement states that within the first two years of study, international students from non-English speaking countries and who did not receive undergraduate degrees in the United States must have their oral English proficiency assessed, and if they are deemed to be “not proficient” they must take an English language course. Currently, the Graduate School pays for the students to take up to two English language classes with the university’s English as a Second Language (ESL) program, and there is no formal offering specifically for international teaching assistants (ITAs). Unlike at Eastwood, there is no clearly articulated policy and program specifically for ITAs. The university is in the process of reviewing its requirements and considering the programming needs of all international graduate students (and has been since this research was first undertaken). The university is considering the need for more robust programming.

The Assistant Dean explained the policy in my interview:

It’s not as in a number of places, specifically tied to teaching, although we do use that as a bit of a stick in saying that you cannot teach until you reach a certain level [of English] but the way we present it is that teaching is one aspect of your life year, in fact in some departments you only teach one semester, so for a lot of students teaching is not that important, but if you want to succeed in the classroom, but also outside the classroom, if you want to go to conferences, you’ve got to get your English up to a certain level.

In this way the policy is a more general policy for overall English ability (it is very unclear, in fact, what English language skills are actually assessed; the main focus seems to be on speaking), but it is still tied in to teaching. The dean’s words show suggest the importance of English language proficiency for all the different roles that graduate students must fulfill.

As we saw at Eastwood, the Westfield dean shared concerns about the current financial situation, with a specific eye for how it affects student funding opportunities



and post graduation opportunities. Because of the position's orientation to student affairs, the Assistant Dean discussed more student welfare issues than the dean at Eastwood, specifically those facing the large percentage of international students in the graduate school. Of those issues the dean views language and acculturation issues as the main problems students encounter. The dean discussed continued consideration of the language policy for international students, as well as ways to try to support students given the decentralized structure of the university. The dean also discussed the student/advisor relationship as perhaps the most consistent issue that he helps students address. The dean's perspective and more about these issues will be seen in the discussion of each of the main experiences.

The dean describes a context of the university that on the surface sounds quite similar to that of Eastwood. It is a decentralized university, specifically with regard to admissions:

Graduate admissions is totally decentralized. The applications come in to our office and get sent out to the departments, and each department has its own committee. Each committee will do things in its own way. For instance in one department you may have people sit down and whittle things down and it's very easy because it's a unified department, but if you are dealing with (other departments) you may have different wings, even in economics you've got people from different areas of economics.

While at Eastwood the dean spoke of decentralization in terms of the challenges with providing language and cultural services, here the dean is talking about decentralization as an issue in terms of what students get admitted. The result is the same; the graduate school is an umbrella structure which can face challenges reaching students, and of letting them know what services are available to them. The dean talks about networks that they have set up through the residence hall community to let students know about support and services that are available to them.

I think that's one of the biggest issues that we face, is getting that word out, on a constant basis, that there are places to turn to because graduate education can be so isolating at times. You can be stuck in your department, and even beyond that in your own lab or in the bowels of the library and feel like there's nowhere to turn. So that's one of the biggest issues that we face ... is trying to get the word out to students that there are places where you can get help.

The dean's words should resonate with those familiar with graduate education at any university; trying to support students who can become isolated is a major challenge, especially because the structure of graduate education is not conducive to intervention. It is clear from the dean's words that the graduate school is committed to helping students and to making their graduate experience positive and successful.

At both universities centralization and the role of the graduate school is an issue, as well as dealing with the potentially different needs of international students, particularly when it comes to language and cultural differences. There are larger numbers of non-native English speaking students, and challenges in reaching out to them. Given such a context, what do the PhD programs in economics look like at each university? Before looking at the specific departments it is important to have a general understanding of the way the field of economics operates.

## Economics

### Field and Subfields

Before moving forward to look at the two specific departments under study here, it is important to have an understanding of the field of economics and the specific subfields in which these students are studying and preparing to enter. Interviews and review of the department websites, as well as other economics department websites and information about the field shows that economics is a discipline with a fairly established system and a well-developed set of rules, norms, and deeply embedded assumptions.

Most PhD programs in economics have qualifying exams at the end of the first year, a second or third year paper, and then a dissertation, of which the job market paper is one chapter. The academic job market drives the discipline, and students and faculty alike seem to place the job market paper as a top priority throughout the graduate program. The DGSs at both Eastwood and Westfield talk about the nature of the job market in economics, how competitive it is, as well as how much harder it can be for students to do original research now when compared to past years. As the DGS at Westfield told me, “It’s also the case, that in economics at least, the amount of work it takes to write a chapter seems to have grown substantially. And the competition for jobs has grown substantially.”

He also explained the job market process:

So basically what happens is the students submit their packages to various universities in the late fall. Then during the meeting of the American Economics Association, which takes place in early January, they are interviewed by schools which are interested in them. So you know they send out packages to maybe 100 schools, maybe 80 schools. Then the schools which become interested, to some degree in students, invite them to interviews. So they get interviewed. And among those the school interviews, they choose a smaller number to come and give seminars, we call that fly outs. So this takes place in Jan and Feb. And then after these presentations the departments make offers. So this is the structure. So you know in the fall there is a lot of pressure to prepare the students for both the interviews and the fly outs. And this is also the time when all those who plan to go on the job market panic, obviously. They have to finish at least, to have one well-written article so that they can present it, and usually they like to have more.

PhD programs are organized around this job market structure; students stay in their programs until they are ready for this intensive process, and as both DGSs told me, while they would like students to finish in four years, more and more students are staying on for a fifth year in order to prepare a better job market paper, in order to increase the likelihood for top placement.

While economics has many subfields, it seems that for the most part the overall

process works the same in each field. As noted in a 2006 report on scholarly communications in economics, “Economists in various subfields and at any point in their careers tend to follow similar research processes and rely on many of the same resources” (Dawson & Rascoff, 2006).

It is important to understand that there are many different subfields of economics. Some are inherently more applied, like development, labor, and public economics. Others are theoretical in nature, like microeconomic theory, game theory or econometrics. The students in this study are in the following fields, listed from the most theoretical to the most applied: game theory, microeconomic theory, econometric theory, international macroeconomics, applied microeconomics, behavioral economics, finance, development economics, public economics and labor economics. One might predict that more theoretical areas demand more technical expertise, and the DGS confirms such a suspicion. The DGS at Eastwood explains some of the nuances with the technical skills needed for each of the subfields:

There is a minimum of technical skills that you need for practically anything you do in economics nowadays...it depends on the area in which you are specializing, pretty much. If you were doing something like microeconomic theory for example, you would be expected to be technical. You would have to have a very good command of math and a very good command of economics....On the other hand there is a substantial part of economics which deals with the more applied part of economics. You would of course have to know basic econometric tools, you know regressions and so on and maybe for some of the studies that you do, not just the bare minimum but maybe a bit more sophisticated tools depending on the type of problem that you are attacking, but you wouldn't have to be kind of a math whiz to do that.

The DGS's words already hint at some differences between the different skills needed in each of the economic subfields. In Chapter 6, we will look specifically at attitudes about technical needs and communication needs for the different subfields. For the most part, international students tend to work more on the theoretical areas of

economics, except in the case of development economics. Development economics, by nature, attracts a large number of international students, particularly from Latin America, South America, and Europe. Labor economics, another popular applied area, tends to be dominated by domestic students. The DGS at Eastwood explained that many faculty in labor economics work with census data, and students need to be American citizens to have access to such data. Given the general context of the field of economics, what do the particular PhD programs look like at Eastwood and Westfield? Eastwood

The PhD in economics at Eastwood is consistently ranked in the top 20 of economics programs, though never in the top 10. Similar to other economics programs, PhD students at Eastwood take qualifying exams after their first year of study, write a paper at the end of their second year and beginning of their third year, continue to do research, write their dissertations and job market papers in the remainder of the program; they are expected to graduate in about five years. In my interview with the DGS of the department, a senior faculty member originally from India, he shared the challenges facing his department. The DGS has been at Eastwood for nearly thirty years, and has held the position of DGS for four years. He expressed the most concern over maintaining and improving the program's ranking and reputation, finding funding for his students, as well as helping them bridge the gap between coursework and research.

As we heard from the dean at Eastwood, the DGS is concerned with the maintenance of excellence, specifically the ranking of the program, which he explained is determined by both admissions and placement:

When you are taking on a student you are not just taking on a student to complete a dissertation, but to be placed well, given Eastwood's ranking in terms of economics department. That's a big responsibility for a faculty member to take on. All of this is going on for 5 years, but people actually

judge the graduate program by “where did your students go” and “what are they doing now?”

Clearly placement is a top issue.

Finally, I spoke with twelve students in their second or third years in the economics PhD program. Of course each student was different; the reader will get to know them through their perspectives on each of the main themes.

Table 3: Eastwood Students

<b>Student</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Subfield</b>	<b>TA duties?</b>
Peng	China	Male	3	Microeconomic theory	Yes
Li	China	Female	2	undecided	Grading only (did not pass assessment)
Min	China	Female	3	International macroeconomics	No (did not pass assessment)
Pablo	Dominican Republic	Male	3	Microeconomic theory and behavioral economics	Yes
Karim	Turkey	Male	3	Microeconomic theory	Yes
Gang	China	Female	2	Econometrics	Yes
Andres	Mexico	Male	3	Development economics	No (other sources of funding)
Jia	China	Male	3	Econometrics	Yes
Yunjeong	S. Korea	Female	2	Applied microeconomics	Grading only (did not pass assessment)
Raymond	Taiwan	Male	3	Corporate finance	Yes
Keith	U.S.	Male	2	Environmental economics	Yes
Paul	U.S.	Male	3	Development economics	Yes

## Westfield

The economics department at Westfield is consistently ranked very highly, always in the top ten and usually in the top five. I learned about the PhD programs

from my discussion with the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), as well as my review of departmental materials. The DGS, originally from the former Soviet Union, did his PhD in the United States, taught abroad for many years, and went to Westfield about ten years ago. He has been the DGS for several years.

In my conversation with the DGS at Westfield he expressed the most concern in his department about helping students learn to do good research, and particularly bridging the gap between coursework and research. Unlike the situation at Eastwood, he was not particularly concerned about funding or placement, which is likely explained by the higher ranking of the program and broader availability of student funding. When I asked him if he worried about securing funding for his students he said: “Um, no.”

The biggest challenge he perceives to be facing his program is the amount of work students have to do and how much the knowledge base in the field is increasing:

I guess the major issue is the amount of professional material is going very fast, but we still have only two years to teach. And we try to keep the work on the PhD dissertations within bounds. We essentially admit only PhD students, therefore we don't have an MA program. So we end up giving MA degrees only to students who for various reasons cannot write a dissertation. So this seems to be the major challenge. It's also the case, that in economics at least, the amount of work it takes to write a chapter seems to have grown substantially. And the competition for jobs has grown substantially. As a result of which students delay their departure, and their attempt to find a job. Students stay now about one year longer than they used to.

In this sense placement is a concern of the department, but not in the same sense as at Eastwood. The DGS is not concerned that students will be placed well, but just that they must stay on in the department longer, which means that there are more students and therefore more work for faculty to do. Other challenges the DGS mentions are the pressure of the job market, and helping make sure students are moving forward on the appropriate path. These issues will be examined in more detail in the sections on

specific student experiences.

The DGS did make a general comment about the motivation of faculty and the general motivation to succeed that speaks strongly to the high stakes nature of the consideration of all of these issues in graduate school:

All top universities, well, all sort of faculty members, especially in top universities, they are in a big competitive game. And there are many dimensions to this competition. You succeed if you manage to do some great research, you succeed if you manage to produce some high profile students who do great research, and so on. So it's part of the professional status. It's unavoidable. But I think it goes beyond that, because if you train grad students, and you invest in them a lot of time and effort, you really want them to succeed. I mean why would you do this? When you cook a dish and you invest a lot of time you want it to succeed too.

In short, part of the reason to help students succeed is self-serving, but also benefits the department, and part of the reason is just because that is what you are supposed to do. The implication is that the best of the best must maintain their status and place as the best of the best as well.

In considering the context of the department it is important to understand that despite the graduate student demographics at the university, most of the international students in the economics department are European or Latin American. In fact, in my sample I was only able to interview two Asian students, Masa, from Japan, and Ron Bin, from Taiwan. I learned from Masa, and from looking at the student roster, that every year there is one student from Japan who comes to work with the professor who studies game theory. Ron Bin told me that the department did not usually admit Chinese students because their credentials can be unreliable. According to Ron Bin, Chinese students are only admitted when a professor at Westfield has a direct connection with the student's advising professor back in China or if they come to Westfield by way of another American or Canadian university. In Ron Bin's case, he



did his undergraduate degree at Westfield. I tried very hard to interview the other Chinese students (only two) in my initial sample of second and third year students, but they did not respond to repeated requests for an interview. One might speculate that the other students who did come directly from China were not comfortable about being interviewed on their experiences. It is also possible that they took the departmental emphasis on working hard seriously; the reader will soon see that, especially at Westfield, time spent on all endeavors apart from the job market paper is perceived as wasted time.

### Student Profiles

Table 4: Westfield Students

<b>Name</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Subfield</b>	<b>TA duties?</b>
Masa	Japan	Male	3	Game theory	Yes (grading only)
Peter	Netherlands	Male	3	Public	Yes
Carlos	Mexico	Male	3	Development and Labor	Yes
Richie	India	Male	3	Finance	Yes
Matteo	Italy	Male	2	Finance	Yes
Pedro	Mexico	Male	2	Microeconomic theory	Not yet
Angelo	Italy	Male	3	International Macroeconomics	Yes
Ron Bin	Taiwan	Male	3	Game theory	Yes
John	US	Male	3	Labor and Public	Yes

Ultimately I interviewed nine students in the department at Westfield. The reader will get to know them through their comments and perspectives on the main experiences of interest here.

### Experiences

Having briefly introduced the background at each university and in each PhD program, I now pull together the voices of the dean, the DGS, and the students at both Eastwood and Westfield with regard to each of the key experiences of graduate

education: funding and TA duties; tension between research and teaching as well as PhD students' transition to research; general scholarly obligations, including learning to write and present for the field; finding and building a relationship with an advisor; the role of peers; and the job market and career goals. While the experiences expose general issues that all graduate students encounter, in each case I specifically highlight the experiences of non-native English speaking graduate students. Finally, in connecting the points from each key experience, a picture of what students' academic lives look like at both Eastwood and Westfield will begin to emerge. It is important to note that I tried to preserve the original voices of the deans, DGSs and students, including any errors they made while speaking to me, in order for the reader to get a fuller sense of the participants and the way they speak.

#### Funding and TA Duties

##### Eastwood

Both the dean and the DGS at Eastwood expressed a lot of concern over how the students are funded; clearly financing graduate education is a top concern. Funding is always an issue, but given the current financial climate concerns it seems to be even more pronounced. As the dean told me:

The funding that institutions provide comes from a combination of usually endowment monies, private giving, and sometimes other sources as well. And all of those sources right now are definitely strained. So that's a big issue for us, is how are we going to continue to provide for grad students if some colleges are forced to make TA cuts, we know that there will be some TA cuts, and of course if you don't have funding for the students you can't bring the students in. So at the same time that we very much want to keep grad education as robust as we can, there are of course some adjustments.

The dean also explained that non-native speaking graduate students are usually even more affected by the availability of TAs because they are not eligible for as many funding opportunities as domestic students:

The way that a lot of funding for U.S. students works in terms of being able to apply for certain kinds of loans, certain kinds of grants, certain kinds of fellowships, those are only open to U.S. citizens and permanent residents so there are funding challenges that are built right in to international students who want to come to the U.S. and study.

The end result is that non-US students are more reliant on Teaching Assistantships than are the US students who may have an easier time finding other sources of funding. Given how important TA duties are for international students, the program for ITAs becomes even more important, as does the question of language proficiency for teaching. The dean continues to talk about the role of English:

Language is part of that teaching function...obviously we want to make sure that students have a foundational level of competency that will allow them to communicate effectively and successfully with undergraduate students. So that's another place where we are trying to negotiate what the skill set needs to be, what the minimal skill set is for a particular area, just to be successful in an undergraduate teaching environment.

The dean's words indicate that despite the strong position of the ITA program on campus, there are still some questions about exactly what level of language is needed to teach, and perform well, in particular fields. More connections will be explored in the subsequent section on discipline and subdiscipline in the language ideology chapter.

The economics department at Eastwood is particularly reliant on TAships to fund their students. The DGS explained that most students have fellowships in their first and fourth years, and that they usually have to teach the remaining three years. Funding is not an issue for domestic graduate students, because they are able to hold TA duties without any policy restrictions. Therefore, the DGS is most concerned about students who are unable to hold TA duties because of their oral English skills.

They can face a lot of pressure from the department, because, as the DGS says “from the second year onward we have to support them as TAs.”

The DGS spoke at length about his concerns over the students’ ability to hold TA duties. As he explains:

They are very busy in terms of the academic program itself. I mean they cannot devote time to taking English courses. Some of them do but mostly they don’t have enough time, which means that in the second year before they become TAs and they have to pass the screening. Some of them of course pass it without any problem but others who don’t then there is a problem in terms of how do we support them ... There’s that problem. There’s also the problem of no guarantee that if they take an English course in the fall semester that they will be ready to be TAs in the spring semester. It depends on how quickly they can pick up, especially the speaking part of it.

Once students fall into the category of not passing after one semester, they become an even bigger concern for the department. Students may have to hold grading duties, or the department must find another way to support the student. In extreme cases the students may have to take a leave-of-absence or leave the university entirely. When pressed on broader questions of the role of English in graduate student success, the DGS continually returned to the question of teaching, as if the English proficiency does not impact their research activities. He also expressed a separation inherent in the consideration of English language proficiency; it is seen quite separately from students’ coursework:

I am sure it’s a substantial difficulty for the student because they have to now (after not passing the ITA requirement) think more about the English proficiency and how they are going to survive in the program just because of the English and have to therefore divert their attention from the academic part of the program, consisting of taking advanced courses in the program, getting ready to do research and so on and so forth.

Spending time on English is seen as diverting time from academics. Developing

English language skills is seen as something separate from developing expertise in the field of economics. This issue will be explored further in the sections on the tension between research and teaching, as well as the role of discipline and subdiscipline in the language ideology analysis.

The students themselves are also clearly worried about funding and their ability to hold TA duties. As shown in the table of Eastwood students in the study, Li, Min and Yunjeong are not able to hold full TA duties because they have not passed the ITA assessment. When I asked these women about their experience in the department, they spoke first about their inability to hold TA positions. When I asked them about the role of English language proficiency in their experience, again, the first thing that they mentioned was their inability to work as full TAs, and how stressed they were by their precarious funding situations.

When I asked Min, a woman of few words, about the challenges she faced in graduate school, she simply said, “TA. I can’t TA.” She is a fourth year student in the department, and considers herself successful in her specific area of economics, but is quite frustrated that she has been unable to teach. The department has had to find other ways to fund her, and she worries about her future. She expresses some conflict within the messages she gets about English. “I have no trouble in my department, with my professors or with my peers because when I talk about economics my English is very good.” Her English has not been good enough, however, to pass the TA assessment. There is a gap between what English is necessary to do economics work, and what English is necessary to teach; this can be explained by the overall reluctance of economics to even talk about English skills. It is only explicitly mentioned in conjunction with TA duties.

Similarly, Li is grading and hopes to work as a TA in the next semester. She expresses the pressure she is under because she is not able to TA, though she

understands the rationale behind the policy:

I totally understand the position because our program, our department it has a really large undergraduate program, it needs a lot of TAs and actually I really want to be TA. I always thinking about this problem, is there anything I can do because I don't want to think more about the pressure. Actually there are a lot of things you can do even if you are facing maybe a great or depressive pressure. We always live in such that environment right?

Li is clearly stressed and hopes that she will be able to hold TA duties soon. She told me she is working really hard to improve her English as a result of this pressure.

Yungjeon is the other student in the sample at Eastwood who is holding grading duties because she is unable to be a full TA. She did not talk much about how she felt about her situation. At the time I talked to her she had just learned that she would be able to be a full TA in the coming semester, though she would still have to continue taking an ITA support class. She expressed some difficulties that she had as a grader because she was not always able to understand what students wrote. She also expressed some anxiety about holding full TA duties, despite the preparation she is getting in the ITA class:

Taking the TA class is helpful for improving my speaking English but still I am really nervous. So, I was told that from my senior Korean students, they couldn't sleep ever before the first TA day.

Peng and Jia, like Yungjeon, talked about some of their difficulties as TAs. Peng mentioned that students complain about his accent, and sometimes have trouble understanding him:

And some times in my TA section, when I give my TA section, I cannot realize that I have some accent but the students can realize that and sometime they complain that they have some difficulty in understanding.

Peng talks of general complaints, while Jia talks about a specific incident where he was unable to perform well as a TA and he remembers being treated quite roughly by the students:

I remember that when I was monitoring the first exam for the course which I was a grader, students asked me, several students asked me questions about those problems on the exam because he wanted some clarifications but I just couldn't understand what they were talking about, because they spoke so quickly and because that was in an exam, they couldn't speak loudly, so I couldn't get what they want, so the students, they told that the other teaching assistant here, just to kick me out.

Jia's words here are quite striking; students actually told another TA to kick him out of the exam. While he did not say much more about his experiences, it is clear that being a TA was a significant source of stress. Jia now holds full TA duties and he did not report any further stories or examples of difficulty.

Jia and Peng also commented on the message they receive from the department about English and the pressure they felt to prepare to be teaching assistants. As Peng said:

In econ department we have a kind of TA training and they emphasize the importance of English especially if you get TA sections. So as you know all of the graduate students here are funded as a TA, so if you cannot be a good TA that will be a big problem for you, so I think that is the message from our department.

Jia reports an even more directed message:

I got an email from [the DGS] saying that we don't have any grader positions available so you have to pass the evaluation so that you can be a teaching assistant, you can hold a section, otherwise we have to enforce you to use out all your fellowships. Usually it is used in the fourth year to write your dissertation.... I think that semester was like nightmare, because I had three courses to take, I had to do the grader's job and I had to put a lot of efforts on

the English, so I think I slept a little for the whole of that semester. It was quite a nightmare.

Clearly the pressure to fund students, and therefore employ them as TAs funnels down from the DGS to the students. Jia had to use part of his fellowship, but he did not lose his funding and he was able to improve his language skills enough to pass the assessment and be able to TA in the next semester.

On the other hand, some students consider TAships not as a motivation to improve English but as a method of doing so. In other words, they see teaching as a way to practice English, especially for students who feel they do not have too many chances to speak with others. Andres was the only student in the sample who passed the assessment but has not held TA duties because he had another source of funding. He told me that he actually really wanted to TA, despite how time consuming it is, in order to improve his English and also to be more competitive for jobs in the future. He perceives English language improvement as the primary motivation, however:

As I told you, the market is really tough... to try to get an academic job I definitely need these teaching skills and also in a way to improve my English, to speak more in English because right now I don't. As I told you my wife speaks in Spanish, my best friend in the department speaks Spanish, the other guys speak English and I don't have a problem speaking with them or asking questions in seminars. I still, I believe that I will practice more my English. That way, being a teaching assistant, that's one of the reasons I am hoping to, to be able to teach in English.

Andres is looking at TA work as a way to improve his English rather than an obligation. He also mentions the limited opportunities he has to use English, which is an issue that continues to come up in the department and will be examined great detail in the section on the role of peers. As graduate schools think about teaching, research and communication in general, it becomes clear that the only required or regulated communication that must occur happens while teaching.



Both Min and Paul commented on the distribution of TA duties. Min, as a non-native speaker still struggling to reach the level where she can hold TA duties, told me that often non-native speakers are given the harder, more math based courses to teach. On the other hand, Paul offered a native speaker's perspective on the distribution of TA duties in the department. He said there is a perception that non-native speakers are lucky and get preferential treatment in that they do not have to TA as much or perhaps get easier TA jobs:

There is a perception that the non native English speakers, I am not sure how best to say that, don't really try to learn English like within the program because then they don't have to fulfill their TA duties. So if you can't speak English well enough to TA you just grade, which is perceived as an easier assignment. It doesn't require as much work, you're on your own time so there is a perception that some of those students don't try to pass their qualification because then they can just continue grading, take a lighter load...

So, while the non-native speakers may feel great pressure to TA and struggle to fulfill the requirement, the other side of the coin is this perception by others that non-natives are better off because they get away with doing less work. Paul gives a specific example of the experience of one of his colleagues who had to take on more work because two of the TAs working with him as TAs for an introductory class were unable to be full TAs because of the English language requirement:

There were two that were not able to be TAs, were not qualified to teach because of the English language requirement so he had to teach six sections and hold extra office hours and have 180 students along with the other one and it just created a lot more work for him because the other two students weren't qualified to TA. And that is the other side of grading, since it was an Intro to Micro class there isn't much grading anyway because it's all done online, or computer based scoring, or multiple choice, so there is a bit of a disparity in work load.

In this case the native speaking TA is shouldering the burden that comes from having

non-native speaking TAs in the department that are unable to do all the work. Such a situation may explain some difficult peer relationships and the perceived division in the department, especially between the Asian and the American students. The repercussions of this type of conflict speak to the more difficult to measure impacts on the system of bringing diverse groups of students together. In this specific case the relationship between groups is not harmonious. More about this will be examined in the section on peers.

Clearly the issues surrounding funding and TAs in the economics department are quite complicated. Everyone feels the pressure to teach if they need funding, and systems have evolved to buffer students if they cannot teach right away. Whether TAs are successful, and how the measures in place for non-native speaking students affect the department, as well as the university and undergraduate education, are not simple issues. To add another level of complexity, despite how crucial TAs are to the graduate student experience in the economics department, the overall perception of TA duties is that they are time consuming and really not very important especially compared to research, which will be examined in the next section. Before moving on to consider research, what does the funding and TA situation look like at Westfield?

#### Westfield

While funding concerns seemed less prominent at Westfield, the dean did talk about financial concerns given the economic situation:

For instance, I just had an international student to see me yesterday that's in the sciences. And she was really concerned because her advisor had said he would give her three months to see if she could produce work and if not then he wouldn't be able to fund her anymore. So she was saying where do I turn for funding then? American students can go to NSF, can go to many different places. So, I was working with her and also with the department. But that's something that's repeating itself.

In this case, the student is in the sciences and research funding is becoming more limited, and international students do not have as many funding options as domestic students. He did not talk about the importance of TA duties in his consideration of the financial crisis.

Moreover, it seems that the constrained fiscal situation has not had an impact on the economics department at Westfield. Because the department has sufficient resources, students do not report having to hold teaching assistant duties unless they choose to do so beyond the one-semester teaching requirement. Students are usually able to TA for one semester to fulfill the requirement, and then support themselves with other funding, including research assistantships. None of the students in the sample were concerned about funding; TA duties are generally treated as an extra option, only for those who really wanted to teach. In fact, the DGS did not talk to me at all about TA duties. I learned from the students that there are not enough students in the economics program (willing to teach) to fill the teaching need at Westfield; they bring in students from the law school and other departments. They also hire a small number of lecturers to fill their teaching need.

The students I spoke with do seem to enjoy their teaching, and consider it to be a fulfilling experience. Carlos simply said “I love to teach.” None of the students in the study at Westfield are unable to TA because of English language proficiency. This is the result of less stringent oral English proficiency rules and a less developed policy. At the same time, as a language professional I can say that, in general, the students at Westfield did have higher level of language proficiency. Masa, the Japanese student, is the only student in the study who may have been prevented from holding full duties because of his English language ability. Masa did talk a bit about teaching in terms of his language ability. As he says, “I did one year in the fall so I

didn't have to teach actually. I just have to grade so I was paid as if I taught but I didn't have teach. I just graded."

While Masa was not prevented from teaching because of his English level, one might speculate that the decision to have him grade was the result of his challenges with English. When I asked him why he graded instead of doing other duties he did not seem to know:

In the next semester, I'm going to teach and I'm not sure how I'm doing that but I like teaching so I think it's OK. I don't know how to say it. I don't think it a waste of time to prepare for teaching so I can make strides so I think it's good.

Here Masa's comment harkens back to Carlos's point at Eastwood: being a TA can help him make strides with his English. He also points out that teaching is not a waste of time, which indicates that there is a message in the department that it is a waste of time. Such a message is clearly articulated by other students; in fact teaching is even viewed by some as a form of procrastination.

Peter enjoys teaching, and comments a bit on the role of English language proficiency in his experience:

It might be a minor handicap when it comes to teaching which I do, I guess I'm slightly slow, I guess you're always quicker if you do your talking or speaking in your native tongue. I don't think it does matter, I mean say, I mean the language of such, I don't think my experience has been different from the ones somewhere from Britain.

Other students expressed how much they enjoyed teaching, especially in contrast with how frustrating research can sometimes be. As Angelo says:

Actually, I've heard this and it's actually true, you get true satisfaction from teaching because you can actually help undergraduates. It's something you can actually do. So it feels like you are doing something, fulfilling something.

He says it is something you can “actually do” and see some results. Students’ comments about their research (in the next section) will show a more frustrating attitude toward research. Richie makes a similar point:

This is going back to my point about teaching which I enjoy a lot is precisely because that’s the only thing I do that is structured, like as opposed to partying which is not structured, which gives me gratification. It’s because I put an effort, I see what I’m doing and I can see directly that, you know, it is something important in the sense that I’m adding value, right?

Both students are contrasting their teaching experience with their research experience. They enjoy their teaching experiences because they can see direct results.

Clearly the role of teaching at the two universities is quite different because of the organizational and fiscal context. Westfield students feel less pressure to TA, and seem to enjoy their TA work more. More students at Eastwood have difficulty moving beyond the stress of the TA and English language requirement. In both departments, TAs are seen as vehicles to help students practice and improve English; TA duties emerge as the only required form of communication in which students must engage. Also at both universities, there is the general sense that teaching is less important than doing research. Moving on to the next experience, the tension between research and teaching, it becomes clear that the priority on research is ubiquitous, which is not surprising given both Eastwood and Westfield’s status as premiere research institutions.

### Tension between Research and Teaching

#### Eastwood

While it is recognized that research should come first, especially given that Eastwood is a premiere Research 1 university, it is interesting to look at how

articulated it is within the economics department and how it affects students' experiences. TAs are necessary to fund students, but research is the priority, period. As the dean told me:

We are first and foremost, a Research 1 institution, and because research, and teaching of course, but I think research especially, is at the heart of what we do, all of the grad students who are here pursuing research degree programs become involved in that research mission. And the importance of keeping research going and helping these students develop their own research as well as their participation in research projects that are already underway or may be starting while they are here. It gets back to that issue that they may have competency to participate in a very high level in the research arena. Their time is needed there, their expertise is needed there, and we have to help figure out how to accommodate those other needs that they have to grow as students and to work as teachers in addition to that real push to keep being productive and keep moving forward in terms of the research....And the students themselves feel torn. They know why they came to an institution like Eastwood and what it means to be part of an intensive research environment. So they are as aware as the faculty and others of the challenges and the tensions built in.

Graduate students, as we said from the outset, can be pulled in many different directions. The dean explains how the multiple roles that students have to play can sometimes be in conflict:

One of the things that I am always concerned about, and I very much understand, that there is some tension built in to the competing demands that are placed on graduate students while they are here. We expect them to be students themselves, but we also anticipate that they will be contributing to the research and teaching missions of the university. Sometimes those, in a sense, two identities or those two sets of expectations that we have for them are not perfectly in sync with each other. So that we may, for example here at the Grad School, we may be aware that students may not have as strong a skill set as we could wish, particularly in terms of language skills to be as successful as we could wish them to be as students, at the same time perhaps that they may come to us with extraordinarily high skills say as researchers, and of course that expertise is very much in demand and very necessary. And so I think sometimes we do experience some tension around how grad students are going to apportion their time and how much training they will need in order to be as successful as we need them to be in these various roles.

Research is the clear priority, and the dean's words get at an awareness that graduate students are asked to fulfill multiple roles that may sometimes be in conflict. Being a student, being a teacher, and being a researcher can pull students in different directions.

Within the economics department the importance of research is quite clear. Despite the DGS's preoccupation with filling TAs, it is clear that his main concern in that regard is to ensure PhD students in Economics are funded so they can do their research.. The really important work that students must do when they come in to the economics department is research.

Students also understand that research is the priority, from the department and from looking at what types of jobs senior students are able to secure. As Paul points out:

I mean the most important thing for doing a good job is just to write a good job market paper; everything else is just kind of secondary importance. So even like another colleague of ours that got a good liberal arts placement...she didn't TA a single class her entire time here.

Even in a case where it seems like the teaching duties would be more important, given the liberal arts focus on teaching, the student's research was able to secure her a position and this message was not lost on Paul.

While students generally realize that research is most important for them, assuming they are pursuing an academic career, this is also reported as one of the most difficult transitions for students to make. As Lovitts (2008) points out, the "transition to scholar" is a key turning point for PhD students and can be quite challenging. Other students talk about the challenges they face in starting the research process. Karim says:

Micro theory is really hard so many people avoid doing this because it is hard. I know it's hard but this is the thing that I really want to do ...To come up with good ideas and to come up with a good dissertation, you start early and work hard on it

Pablo talks about the fear that students are not doing enough with their research, and how uncertain the process of research can be. As he says, "The hardest thing for me is the uncertainty...it's kind of like you always have doubts of is the research important or if third year paper is good enough."

The third year paper that Pablo mentions is one of the main efforts that the DGS talks about to help students bridge the gap between coursework and research:

And the big thing is to build a bridge between the coursework and research. For some students it comes fairly naturally...And the coursework is seen as a way to do the research. And even in the second year when they are trying to do their coursework they are very eager to not do coursework anymore and do research. On the other hand for many students it's a difficult bridge.

He talks about the third year paper, and the workshops the department requires for students to present their work and hear others in their field, as one example of how students are supported in their transition to research successfully.

Min sees doing research as her biggest challenge apart from being able to hold TA duties. As she said, "the hardest thing is choosing a good topic and explaining the results." She talks about the problems she often faces: "I want to solve the model, but can't finish, or I solve the model, but the results are bad, so I must choose another topic then...the paper is dead." Paul talks about a similar struggle, as well as how it relates to students' individual advisors:

Yeah just trying to understand like what is a good one (topic) or what is the right question and what can I do. That is probably the struggle of finding an



advisor or in finding one that knows the literature well enough to understand what is new in this field or what hasn't been done or this is the right technique to use...

Doing research is hard, and the advisor is generally seen as the individual that can help the student figure out the process and identify the need for a particular line of research. The advisor relationship will be discussed in greater detail after looking at general scholarly obligations, largely related to the writing and presenting of research. First, though, an examination of the way issues around research play out at Westfield is in order.

#### Westfield

As one can begin to see from their comments about teaching, the true priority of the Westfield students, and of the department as a whole, is research. Consistently every student I interviewed told me that the most important thing they have to do in their time at Westfield is write a good job market paper. Anything you do that takes you away from the job market paper, or writing papers in general, is a distraction and a waste of time. Ron Bin perhaps had the most striking way of putting this: "teaching is a form of procrastination." He claims to love his experience teaching because he feels he is contributing, but in the end it is really just a productive way to waste time, or at least to spend time that takes him away from his research.

Matteo expresses a similar attitude. He seems to have quite a negative feeling about what it means to be an academic in economics. He did say that he liked to teach, though:

I felt that it was a waste of time but it is rewarding. The whole career of economics is not rewarding at all... In the end it's something that I like to do and so I did employ a lot of time on it but actually it's a waste.

And why is it a waste? Because the most important thing a PhD student in economics

has to do is write a good job market paper. It is unclear why Matteo is studying at Westfield. He seems not to find the field rewarding, and he seems generally to have a negative attitude, but I was unable to discern from my meeting with him whether he became more negative after he arrived at Westfield or whether he came here knowing what it would be like. Matteo went on to talk a little more about his attitude towards teaching:

But it's so commonly known, it's not rewarded but you do it as a pleasure here, that's the whole idea. So at this stage and probably until you get tenure it is not good to spend too much time. Which is a pity because it's an important, I think it should be an important part of the academic life to teach, but that's how the system works.

As we saw with the students at Eastwood, research is important and challenging for the students at Westfield. The DGS talks about helping students transition from the coursework to the research phase of the PhD program:

There is sort of basic training that they need. We provide it through courses. So this is essentially, consists of a set of courses that develop basic skills that allow you to do research and be able to understand what you read in the professional literature. Plus field courses, which in addition to these functions, provide a coverage of the field. So you understand the field you know the basic literature, you know what the issues are, you know how various important issues have been approached by other researchers. This is part of the training but this is really only background. Because then when it comes time for them to do the independent research, this is the part where it becomes very difficult. So if they have read scientific articles, they have seen how people write articles, how they pose the questions, what is considered to be an interesting question, how they try to answer them. In principle they know these things but there is a big leap from this passive knowledge to active knowledge. Trying to implement this yourself, to figure out what's an interesting question and to try to find the right framework to address it, there is a lot of flexibility in this. To find the right tools, the analysis can be difficult. So I think this is where the big struggle is, and this is where they need the most help.

His words here show quite similar concerns to the DGS at Eastwood; helping

students with this transition from student to researcher is clearly a difficult task.

Students consistently expressed their difficulty in doing research. Richie talked a lot about how he struggled with research, particularly in finding the question:

In the real world, your question is fixed, you know, you say, OK, I do this and I earn more money and I know what to do after I earn more money. Whereas here, you first... You can't even find your question...It can't be easy enough because it will look like you didn't do much work. So, to find the question and then try to answer ...and a lot of energy is built by most people including me is finding the question....And, it can be really, really frustrating precisely because you want to do work. You're at your desk everyday for sometimes 15 hours, right? But, you don't know what to do because you're not defining the question.

Finding the question can be quite challenging for students. Peter says he does not have trouble finding questions, but struggles more with making sure his work is creative.

I come up with interesting research questions actually collecting data and, I mean, it's the creativity part that can become stressful and a lot of the actual research work is just tedious it something you know when you start. I guess those are the hardest parts.

Finding research questions and being persistent are the main issues that students mention when discussing research. Again, Richie talks about persistence in research, and how long you have to be prepared to wait:

It's very stressful to do research. The real, long, big issue is long gestation periods. You don't get feedback for a while. You don't even know how it's going to go. There's so much uncertainty. You keep working. Keep sculpting, keep sculpting every day, in and out, in and out. You don't know... so, it can really be depressing. Sometimes, you realized things aren't working and you spent four months on it. It happened to me. So...you scrap it and start again. This can be depressing, right?

His comments sound quite similar to what some of the students at Eastwood said; you work for a long time and may have to start over if you do not get results. John shared a similar idea about how much time you feel you can lose when trying to start research:

When the research phase started last fall I lost a semester on that...not too much loss in a sense that I wasn't doing anything, but just it was sort of trying move forward on the projects that were kind of destined to not to go anywhere and then I feel like in the last 6 months or so, I started actually working on stuff that will probably lead to publication material.

Students can have a hard time staying on track, which leads them to stay in the PhD program longer than they might have expected or longer than might have been possible if they had been able to start their research smoothly. The DGS also mentions this challenge:

You have to be attuned to the needs of the students, to how well they are doing. This is why it's really important for them to talk to their advisors as much as they can. It's easy to go astray and waste 6 months on something that leads nowhere.

It is clear that students at both Eastwood and Westfield are focused on their research, but at the same time they may have trouble staying on track. From this data, it does not seem to matter what country students are from, of what their native language is; they learn the norms of the field and they try to adhere to them. The main priority is to produce good research. Their ability to move forward with their research affects their own experiences as students but also puts a burden on the department to help them move through. The general expectation is that students will learn how to proceed by example, through their relationships with faculty mentors and from observing their peers. As they proceed, they have to learn what their general

obligations are as prospective economics scholars. What do scholarly obligations look like for economics students in these departments?

### Scholarly Obligations

To be successful, graduate students must learn how to write and present their research in their chosen field. This takes place in their own departments and out in the professional environment at conferences, job interviews, and other professional settings. Similarly, they need to learn how to interact professionally in a primarily research environment. While the norms and rules central to shaping students' decisions are presented in the institutional analysis highlighted in the next chapter, it is first important to identify what scholarly obligations look like in this field of economics.

Eastwood

The DGSs at both schools expect students to learn by modeling the behavior in various settings. How do students learn to write papers? By reading papers, of course. How do students learn to present their work? By attending and observing presentations by faculty, visitors, and fellow students. The DGS at Eastwood believes that the third year papers, and students' presentations of them in workshops organized around subdisciplines, teach students how to be scholars of economics:

What is better than that in terms of exposure to how research is done? Here's how research is done, and here is how research is presented. We think that plays a big role in terms of giving students ideas. They get feedback from faculty, but more important they get feedback from their classmates. "Why are you doing this?" and "I didn't understand that part" and "what are you doing over there?" and so on and so forth. It really stimulates them in terms of doing research. It has helped a lot.

The DGS does point out that students often need a bit more directed guidance, and shared what he does with his own individual advisees to help them learn the

expectations, which again, connect back to modeling:

We have discussions on the board over here. I ask them to write it down after I am reasonably assured that it's an interesting result that they have established and sometimes it's a long way from a polished version. And I find that I have to basically teach them the steps of writing. And I advise them why don't you go and look at published articles and journals, look at how people write. How you introduce a paper to the reader, how you build it up, how you present your results, how you present even your references, everything. And it's all out there. It's remarkably easy now compared to when I was in graduate school, because you can just go online and get all of this help. It takes a lot of time to get them to write. They know what they have done, but to get them to write what they have done... I have been doing it basically on a one to one basis, whenever I've taken on students. I think most faculty do that in terms of their feedback. They get a written version and they mark it up in red and we hope that the algorithm converges to a polished version that can be submitted to a journal.... We do it, but we do it one to one.

He indicates that the same types of strategies work for learning presentation skills, though it is clear that the writing is most important. You learn by doing, and with the sense that speaking may be less important to writing. Students discuss their approaches to learning these methods in a similar way. As one student, Gang, says:

As I think the only way that we learn the presentation skill in Economics is in the workshop. For example in the workshop of my advisor, each student do presentation each week by turns so through this way we practice the presentation skills other than communicating the ideas and all students will point out the problems in the presentation so every student can get to improve.

Like Keith says "there are also presentation that we give too that I think it is not like the same as paper writing but you get a lot of the feedback there on how your argumentation is working and like what people perceive as your major weaknesses through that." It is expected that you learn by observation of senior students and peers, as well as from your advisor.

In terms of professional interaction and conference attendance, most students

in the study had not yet had the opportunity to attend a conference. Gang was the only student who shared a conference experience with me:

My advisor said it was a very good opportunity to know people to communicate the topic, the ideas with them. But for me I think it was very difficult to join them to enjoy this opportunity since on one hand I don't have specific topics or ideas to communicate with. On the other hand I think I had some problems in language which make me cannot communicate with them just like in the native language.

In this case her language skills, or her level of comfort or familiarity with the environment, prevented her from participating fully in the scholarly environment. It is unclear whether her performance at the conference will affect her future, but the priority on research helps students feel that their participation may not be that important. Pablo's words on this topic are similar to what other students said:

Maybe speaking is more important when you go to a seminars and you got to present your paper and you try to participate in the social network like kinds of the economics, but at the end of the day like after you publish your paper or after you got it published, you can write it through even if you don't have very good presentation skills or speaking skills.

Similar to this reduced emphasis on speaking skills in the external environment, there also does not seem to be a noticeable emphasis on speaking or interaction in the department. Most of the international students reported that they did not attend departmental social events, such as picnics, nor did they feel pressure to participate in any specific functions. More detail about this will be discussed in both the language ideology chapter and the section about the role of peers: why are students not participating? Is it because of English, or cultural differences, or the lack of a clear message of the importance of participation and interaction, or them not feeling comfortable? Both Raymond and Keith expressed great frustration about the

department in this regard.

Raymond is interested in going into business, so for him networking is important. His experience will be highlighted further in the career goals section. Keith expresses a more general frustration with the international students in his department:

I think I actually became very disillusioned in general about trying to do anything about that because I really pushed it. Like whenever we went out I would invite the kids from like Turkey, China and what not...I have actually gotten really pessimistic about them like I sort of feel like they are just like a suck on resources and they contribute very little. They have very little interest in interacting with mostly other students. I mean in particular I feel like this is the case with mainland Chinese students...they are really just here to get the degree and leave.

Keith speculated that perhaps these students were from cultures that did not value collaboration:

I wonder if it is maybe because the group that is here is very, very academic... they probably worked their way through the system that didn't reward any sort of involvement in the greater academic community or collaboration with classmates or anything like that.

Participation may be seen as wasting time, or a distraction from the most important work of research and writing. Min's comment is in clear contrast with Keith's preoccupation with participation and collaboration. Many of the non-native English speakers emphasized their focus on individual work, but she did the most strongly: "I do my work by myself. The coauthored paper will be discounted. You should show independence in your research."

In terms of the field, she is correct. The all-important job market paper must be individual work, and so the field itself perhaps does not emphasize enough the collaboration that Keith would like to see in the department. More probing should go into the actual value of networking and professional interaction in the field. In



summary, students' scholarly obligations are to write their papers and just get through the presentations of the papers. When in doubt about what to do, write a paper by oneself. Now turning to Westfield, the situation looks quite similar, which is not surprising given the uniformity of expectations across the field of economics.

#### Westfield

At Westfield none of the students talked specifically about experiences going to conferences, though we did talk about how students learn the conventions for writing and presenting their work. Similar to Eastwood, students are supposed to learn by reading and going to presentations. As the DGS told me:

They see a lot of variety. I think they are intelligent enough to judge what are good presentations and what are bad presentations. Not every professor is a great expositor in class and they see, so presumably they try to learn from those who make well-structured and convincing presentations. They also learn from reading articles. They can see what's a well-written article and what's not. If they have great difficulty following an argument in an article then they should understand this is not a good way to present an argument, and when they read an argument which is relatively easily to follow they should understand that this is a well-structured argument. They learn from all of this. And yes, they get feedback from their advisors on what they write. And this includes whether it's well-structured, whether it's a good argument or not a convincing argument, so they get feedback on all this and hopefully they internalize it and learn from it. I'm sure they do. But you know, as always some students are more eager to learn than others and those who are more eager learn more, that's it.

Students are expected to learn from their experiences, but even the DGS acknowledges that this method may not always be effective. Students may learn that the standards are low. If they see a poorly written article or a poorly presented paper, it could mean less incentive to perform well. The DGS does not discuss how the students are meant to understand that something is "good."

It is interesting to see how the students' perspectives on good writing and speaking skills compare with the DGS. Angelo's statements about both writing and

presenting are very similar to what the DGS said:

Professors give feedback usually to students when they present. So you're sure there -- when you see the presentation of other students, you can also understand what professors like in the presentation and what they didn't like. And this is I would say how you learn.

Students learn how to present from presenting, seeing others present and getting feedback. Similarly, for writing, students learn by reading:

Well that's basically mostly done by reading papers and taking classes and I even think that when we first -- actually maybe even more when you co-author with a professor; you see how he works because obviously when you read the paper you don't see what's behind it. When you work with the professor you see how he works. You learn a lot.

There is a general understanding that writing is more important than presenting, but both skills are valuable. Of the students I talked to, Pedro had the most positive attitude about the value of being a good presenter:

So, the first thing is that they expect you to be good selling an idea, right? And, the second one is not that you're able to present it like properly with like proper upper class British English but they expect you to make all the guys in the audience, like you know, interested in your thinking.

On the other hand, Peter talks about his views on the relative poor presentation skills that economists have:

I just pick up on it by seeing other people's work. Most of the standards in terms of presentation skills are pretty low. Sometimes people just slice it a bit bald, and they go through them... Yeah, but it doesn't alarm me as long as no one else I feel is any better at it, right? I mean, it's a pretty comfortable equilibrium outcome where no one tries, so it doesn't matter.

Peter is essentially saying that there is not much incentive in economics give good

presentations given the common experience of watching poor presentations. While Masa does not go that far, he also seems to think that the way to present work in economics is pretty simple:

Personally, I don't think I've learned that way to present from someone. I am just doing the presentation in the way that I can understand my presentation as if I were a student, I were audience. I didn't have experience to imitate a way of a good presentator. But good presentator, I'm not sure about the other fields but good presentator in this field have the similar way to present so their talks are not very difficult. That's a very important thing.

While the opinions may seem a little extreme, even the DGS agrees that economists are not the best at presenting their work: "I think economists are not as good speakers as sociologists or political scientists. They just are not."

Other students talk about the struggles they have seen their classmates encounter when presenting. As Angelo says:

You see how sometimes the presentation gets stuck on something that is not that crucial or -- and it's really bad, because then the student may not be able to reach the point at that time that he is allowed to talk or you may waste time on something that's not really important. Or sometimes it's even hard to -- sometimes the idea turns out to be not -- it's like you're not able to communicate the entire idea, and it may seem less good than it is if you're not able to explain what you're doing. It may seem less good than it is and that's really bad.

Masa talks about his own struggles with English in giving a presentation, specifically in answering questions:

Just like, I think the audience understand my presentation, hopefully, yeah because I try to write important things, everything important on the slide so I think that was ok. But like sometimes, people ask questions and sometimes, I don't understand so that was a big problem.

Most students I spoke to did not say much about their experiences learning to write for economics. It is seen as an important skill, but one that is not that difficult if you have the technical ability in economics. Angelo sums up such an attitude about writing:

So, many people say that it's really important to be able to write very well; and that the best economists are the ones that write mostly in a beautiful way. I think I will never get to that level...but I can manage the scientific language.

More detailed consideration of students' writing and presenting experiences at Westfield will be considered below in the language ideology analysis.

Unlike at Eastwood, students did not express concern about student participation in events. Overall the department seems a bit more unified, which may be due in part to the student demographics. More investigation into this issue will also come up in the language ideology analysis.

In summary, scholarly obligations at Eastwood and Westfield look quite similar, and fit with the overall disciplinary expectations from the field of economics. There is an expectation that students will learn by example, but the flaws with this expectation also are clear. The study shows that students learn the most about scholarly obligations from their advisors and their peers. What does the advisor relationship look like?

### Advisor Relationship

#### Eastwood

Clearly connected to all of the above issues are the student's advisor, developing a relationship (or not) with the advisor and the particular messages students get from them. In the department at Eastwood, students are supposed to choose their advisors after their second year of study. All of the students I interviewed had an advisor, or a good idea of who their advisor would be. Surprisingly, the

advisor relationship was not mentioned as a substantial concern for many of the students, though the DGS did acknowledge that it is a big step for students and many of them struggle to do it on time:

They typically tend to look around in the third year quite a bit before they can settle on a particular area that they definitely want to work in, and then talk with the faculty member to see whether the person would be willing to serve as the chair...It's a tough transition and you have to show a faculty member a sufficient amount of work before the faculty member would agree because you can't just say you want to work in a particular area and it takes time to do that work, to show them that this is what you want to do...They have some difficulty I would say. It takes them some time to find, especially the faculty member who is going to be the chair, then the chair kind of helps them in terms of finding suitable persons who would make up the rest of the committee. Finding the chair yes, I would say, it's difficult..... *but not noticeably different for the foreign students.* (emphasis added)

Most of the students in the study found their advisor through taking courses. As Pablo told me, "for my chairperson, the way was I took his course, he told me that the, out of 12 people that were taking his course, he probably says that to everyone, but he says that my paper was the best one." He ended up being his advisor. Min also told me that she got a good grade in her advisor's course and then just approached him and he agreed.

While it may seem simple for the international students, both American students talk about finding an advisor as a more nuanced process. Keith talked a bit about the process he went through, talking with other students:

(I talked to) not older but further along students and see what their experiences have been with certain people and how they went about initiating that because you know it is a kind of a big thing to pick who you are going to work with. It's not like a lot of other fields where you come in and you know we are going to work with this one person...I mean people have different theories about how you should pick them and so I'm just at this point sorting through how I want to go about doing that. You know do you want to go with the person who knows my work the best and is most interested in what I do or do I want to go for the person who has ....the highest achievement in the terms of academic

background.

Paul also mentioned weighing different options in the advisor decision. He also talked to peers, and was in a situation where the professor with the most closely matched research interests did not seem like the best candidate to be his advisor for other reasons:

So there was another person that was more topically like if you looked at all of the CV's of all the faculty like he would probably be the one that was most similar to my interests. And I took his class and I was involved in a kind of research group with him and some other students had some more interests. But personality-wise it just wasn't necessarily a good working relationship as far as feedback and encouragement and just guidance it just wasn't working on my end on the side of things. So I was just looking for other people that could actually provide the right kind of advice and guidance.

Both American students I spoke with at Eastwood talk about finding their advisor in a nuanced way, taking personality and style into consideration, but it seems that the international students do not. Yunjeong's comment is in clear contrast to what Paul and Keith said:

So I took his class in this semester and I taught him much about my research idea and he gave me some various comments and so I'm thinking he will be my potential advisor in my future. So...I think I have to choose him as my advisor.

We learn from Pablo, Min and Yunjeong that the advisor choice can be executed quite simply. In this case, we do not examine the ultimate success of any of the student/advisor relationships.

Gang was the only student in the study who knew her advisor before she came to Eastwood:

I think it is a special situation for me compared to other students because I

knew this professor before I came here in my college since he was also a joint professor in my college and in my last year, in my senior year I went to one of his seminars and talked to him that I was interested in this field ...and finally I got a recommendation letter from him and he actually recruited me here so that was the reason I have some connection with him.

She agreed with Keith that for other students the process can be challenging, and told me the story of one of her classmates who has struggled a bit:

I feel it is just like gamble for students if they have no connection with any of the professors in the department before they become a student. For example one of my friends also a Chinese...she is just like *shopping around to find any chance*. (emphasis added) I think that it's a common situation in my department if they have no Master degrees or they want to transfer to another field.

Once students have an advisor the relationship is crucial to their progress and success. Keith also talked about bit about this; he thinks that students should get more guidance from their advisors:

I see a lot of people who go through who I just kind of have to think, like how did their advisor okay this or how did their advisor not sit them down and be like this is not working.

While the DGS talks about the way he gives feedback to his individual students, it is not clear how other students interact and learn from their advisors, or how much feedback they get. Students report that communicating with their advisor is important, and none mentioned having any specific concerns about their own advisors. The American students in the study talked about their advisor process in more detail than the non-native speakers; it could be that they are tuned in to more of the nuances that are important in choosing an advisor. The commentary around students' advisors is highly relevant to the discussion of institutional uncertainty, and will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. The situation at Westfield is quite similar.

Westfield

Having a successful advisor relationship is consistently mentioned as one of the keys to general success as a PhD student. Everyone seems to know that the advisor is central, but there are different considerations of why. The advisor may be perceived as important because of his/her own reputation. In addition, students mention the advisor's role in giving feedback and guiding them. While some students seem to be aware of how important personality and style can be to the advisor relationship, for the most part this is where difficulty can arise. As the dean at Westfield told me:

The traffic that I see is mostly about advisor-advisee relationships. So that's something that I don't think will ever go away, because you are dealing with human beings. I don't think the best run graduate program is going to be without that. There will always be conflict and students just need to know that there is help and support...

The dean goes on to talk about what he considers the more important elements of an advisee/advisor relationship:

I think a good advisor is someone who gives very clear indications of what he or she expects in an advising relationship... But I think a good advisor will say at the beginning of an advising relationship "here is how I like to work." ... So that students know initially what to expect. Because often I hear from students that they will go into an advising relationship and then a year later they will say that this person isn't what I expected, or my work style doesn't work with this person, there's a clash. And I will say well how much did you explore before you took this person on as your advisor, because it's your choice. And often they will say well, not really, because the subject area looked like it matched what I wanted to do and that was the most important thing... A relationship is many faceted, it's not just what you're going to study, but it's how you're going to study it and when you're going to study it and what your advisor expects of you.

The dean points out that students, particularly international students, often do not realize the complexity that can be involved in the relationship. His words reflect what



seems to be going on at Eastwood; some international students choose the advisor simply based on their research area and do not consider the issue further. The dean at Westfield helps students deal with the repercussions of such decisions.

The situation with advisor relationships in the economics department at Westfield seems similar to that of Eastwood in the sense that most students did not report too many difficulties with their advisor. At the same time, however, many students I interviewed at Westfield could not really name their advisor. The DGS explains:

Well it's essentially almost every committee member is an advisor. We have a formal chair eventually, but it's actually not known a priori necessarily who's the chair. It's really up to the students. They can go around and talk to people for 2-3 years, and then at the last moment decide who's the chair. I would say that everybody who advises a student advises a student.

Students are therefore free to work with different professors and may not have formal advisors until the end of their PhD program. When pressed on whether students find such ambiguity difficult, the DGS said:

There are many students who have difficulties so we have instituted a formal procedure... Some students are shy and so they don't go to talk to faculty members until they feel they have done enough work to impress somebody. Others just cannot find a subject, and they need help but they are reluctant to go and talk to somebody, in order to seek help. Still other students sometimes are not sure exactly in what area they want to work, and they fluctuate across different fields....So we have instituted this formal procedure whereby they are required to submit a prospectus, signed by, I don't remember the number, maybe 2-3 faculty members. ...But the key is that it forces them to go to somebody and talk to them in order to get a signature. By talking with some number of faculty members, they become at least attached to some extent. And if the conversations are good they might develop some research supervised by one of these people...But of course it hasn't eliminated all people who have difficulty. So we try to identify them. We have every, once a year or twice a year now, we survey the students to see with whom they work. We have a faculty meeting in which we report these attachments and try to verify with faculty members that indeed they know the students who are supposedly attached to them. And if we find students who maybe submitted a prospectus but then didn't go back to talk to anybody for 6 months or so we contact them and try to find out what's happened and we encourage them to tighten these

connections.

The DGS's words indicate how much freedom the students really have at Westfield.

Richie's words are an example of what the DGS means:

I don't really have one adviser now. I'm working with two or three different people. I have time when I should signal to one of that he is my main advisor.

Other students I talked with were not quite sure who their advisor would be. As

Angelo said, even as a second year student:

I don't know yet how you chose your advisors, because in the end it's more than one. I think that the main advisor is going to be the one that follows my job market paper or the paper that I will write for finding a job; and so it would be decided, more or less, later on when I'll be actually working on my job market paper.

At the same time, there are students who follow a more typical path to getting an advisor; Ron Bin and Masa both knew who their advisors would be before they started. As Masa said:

When I was in Tokyo, I wrote a paper on a paper which was written by a Westfield professor. I sent that paper to the professor and so I knew him before I came here and he knew me so he's my professor, I feel he's my professor so it was very natural. I didn't have to go to his office, saying that I want to be his student, yeah.

Ron Bin worked with his advisor at Westfield as an undergraduate, so he also followed a more traditional way to find an advisor.

Consideration of the advisor relationship at both Eastwood and Westfield shows the typical ways that students find advisors as well as the challenges they may encounter. Most striking here is that most international students seem to think very

simply about choosing the advisor whose work most closely matches their own, and may ignore other factors that may end up being important in a working relationship. The other clear factor that emerges here is the uncertainty surrounding the process at both schools. In a graduate school system that is based on an advisor/apprentice model of learning, what does it mean that many students are not sure who their advisors are? Much more about the advisor process will be considered in next chapter, institutional analysis. In addition to the advisor relationship, peers also emerged as important forces in student learning and progress in some sense in an advisory role and in other senses simply as a knowledge base.

### Role of Peers

Peers emerge to be quite important in the lives of graduate students at both Eastwood and Westfield. Students classify peers as an important source of information and support, as well as a source of pressure for competition. Some students seemed to be more involved with their peers than others; their commentary here also allows for a cultural consideration on the role of peers.

#### Eastwood

At Eastwood, consideration of peers shows how valuable they are but also some of the divisions that exist in the department. All of the students mentioned how important their peers are except for Min, who said “You can hear rumors. They are not the authority. It is best to talk to the DGS.” In this section, the importance of peers at Eastwood will be considered, as well as the apparent separation between language and cultural groups within the department.

Many students categorize their peers as important parts of their support network. As Gang points out, “I once talked to the DGS and asked him the pattern of learning economics in the department and he told me the best way, the most common way is to communicate with the peers in the same field.” The department is sending

the message that peers are an important source of information, and Karim, Yunjeong, Andres, Gang, Jia, Li, Peng, Keith and Paul talk about how much help they have gotten from their peers. As Karim said, “there is one senior student in my department and he is also Turkish and he knows the faculty very well and he gave me some advice about it.” Here Karim is talking about making connections with faculty.

Yunjeong also talks about the importance of talking to peers while looking for an advisor:

I think first thing is that asking for help or advice from the other student is the best idea because students understand the students’ situation better. So I ask many Korean senior students about that advisor issue so they gave me a lot of comments or help. They gave me some tips for disadvantage or advantage of taking him or her...

For Andres, he received help from a peer on difficult course content:

So I was really stressed because I was thinking that I was getting behind my class in terms of courses that requires mathematics but fortunately this guy from Dominican Republic that we didn’t have this language barrier he was a, he’s an engineer and he was able to explain a lot of mathematics, a lot of trouble that I have had in mathematics.

Gang also talks about how much she learned from a senior student in the important stage where she is making the transition to doing research:

Now, I just talk to one of my senior students in the third year because he started his topic last year at this time, so I think he has a lot of experience of starting in a certain period and he got masters degree before so he had more experience from the very beginning so I talked to him several times and he shared his interesting topics with me... and he suggested to me get some new ideas for these papers.

Jia reports a similar experience:

For me I have several students, I have several friends who will discuss something with me almost every week...we will discuss, we will talk about what we are doing recently and how do you make progress on your research, we will talk about those things, we will exchange the ideas and the progress we are making. And I actually have a classmate who is also doing econometrics with me and I have a friend who is a second year student, he is a Korean student, he is also doing econometrics and he, talks with me a lot about his research and I talk to a fifth year Chinese student in econometrics student very frequently.

Li has also learned a lot from her peers. As she says “I talked with my friends, especially my friends who were already at Eastwood for maybe two or three years and they taught me a lot.”

It is clear from these student comments that it can be important to have peers that speak the same native language. In Jia’s case, the peers he deems important are from his home country, or from Korea. When directly questioned, these students did not report consulting with any of their domestic peers which leads to the consideration of the division between language and cultural groups in the department. Andres views this as a problem:

The biggest problem you want to see in that way is that I didn’t share a lot with most of my partners, most of my classmates [from other countries] because, I will say because of cultural differences or something like that.

Keith and Paul both report consulting with peers as well, but importantly not international peers. Paul talks about passing information from cohort to cohort:

I mean hopefully you have enough friends that are further along in the program than you that you can talk to and just kind of get advice from as far as what process they followed so it's just kind of more the wisdom passed down through the cohorts.

As Keith says, “primarily a lot of my decision is based on people I know who I have

worked with specific professors in the past and how that's going for them.” Keith and Paul, as American students, both indicate that they share most with their American classmates. Keith goes on to say, however, that he feels his cohort is actually much smaller than it would seem:

I mean the other thing is to that theoretically we have a class of 20 but I feel like I'm in a class of five or six because they are the only people that I've heard interact or speak up in class or contribute to presentations. Or when I need feedback, I have classified people for that too. So I really feel like there is a lot of funding and resources that go into this gigantic group of people and really there is very few of us who contribute to the department. And it is hard when you are ...like yesterday we had like a department picnic and there were like three of us who did all the work for this picnic for over 100 people. In the end I can send emails till I'm blue in the face saying that I need help on such and such project, but I will never get a response back from any of that half of the class.

Keith's emotions about the demographics of the department affect his willingness to work with peers from China in particular:

I mean it makes me skeptical a lot of times of helping a lot of these students because I'm like well if you are just doing this just to get something from me why would I spend a lot of time on helping you out with this...

Andres also talks about his views of the Chinese students as not sharing: “definitely, I don't see them to share a lot not [or] even to write papers together.” Finally, Yunjeoung also talks about the split between peers:

Our department has a lot of non-native students, but almost they are from Korea or China so we have no other access to hang out with the other students from US or the other country because there are no European students in our department. Almost, they are from Asia or the States, but Asia students always hang out with Asian students and the other US, US guys hang out with themselves more.

It seems clear that regardless of individual perspectives, there is a division between

language and/or cultural groups in the department at Eastwood, which has a negative impact on cooperation and collegiality.

#### Westfield

The situation at Westfield is similar in the sense that peers are seen as quite valuable. The department, however, does not seem to suffer from such a demographic split. Peer groups seem less based on language. Moreover, at Westfield students also talk about peers as a source of pressure and competition, which did not come out as much at Eastwood.

As is clear at Eastwood, peers are a general source of information. As Angelo says, “well, if we are talking about whether I get information on the general things about the PhD, probably it's mostly from other PhD students.” Peter also talks about the informal nature of information flow: “People tell each other so I guess the information works flows within. I mean it's so very informal but it ends out working out.”

More than information, however, according to Richie, it is your peers in graduate school who determine the success of your experience:

The main difference between a good university and a bad one is who your classmates are. It's not so much of the professors. You don't see a professor that often. Once every two weeks, it's who you see every day that still fascinates me. That's incredible at Westfield, I have to say. My classmates are absolutely incredible...they are so talented. I can connect more in so many different things.

Richie's words here really speak to how valuable peers can be in a collaborative, collegial and intellectual environment.

Peers at Westfield are also a source of pressure and competition. Given the uncertainty of the environment, it makes sense that students look to their peers for guidance. As Pedro says:

So, I looked back to the things that I was doing and then I look to the things that the guys with good grades in my class were doing, right? I'm a very competitive guy. I don't know. I just like, you know, I'm... I guess I feel bad if there is like other people working more than me. It was like... I have that perception that like everyone is smarter than me so that if I don't like working as much as them, I'm basically screwed, right? So, that's why I work like crazy.

Richie also talks about naturally looking to peers as a benchmark:

So a lot of people feel substantial amount of pressure when they see other people working and I know many people can't stand this fate, you know, because there's so much pressure they feel from other when that people are working. They get very stressed...there's no reference point, right? There is no reference point along the way that you're OK, you're doing fine. Your project is okay or they are not... There is lack of enough reference point. So, one natural reference point to look for is what others are doing.

Depending on individual perspectives, peers challenge each other to succeed, or can create a competitive atmosphere.

Finally, Masa's experience at Westfield sounds similar to students' at Eastwood. His Japanese peers provide him with information as well as put pressure on him to succeed. For him it is important that his peers are Japanese:

Each year, one Japanese student is admitted at Westfield so they are all theory students. They are all doing Game theory. They're all admitted by one professor and they are very successful in the job market. I talked with them frequently and about real research and the other stuff in like they've given this year. I think that was my way to adjust here.

In this case, Masa uses his connections with other Japanese students to help him progress through his program. At the same time, their example puts pressure on Masa to do good work. He sees the success of senior Japanese students as a source of pressure, even though he says they do not tell him directly that he was to work hard.



As he says “They don’t say that I have to write papers but I feel bad by myself, yeah.”

It is clear from looking at student experiences at both Eastwood and Westfield that peers play an important role in graduate school. At Eastwood, the department demographics and some apparent tensions emerge. Despite such tensions, it is clear that peers, whether from the same language or cultural group or not, become a source of support for the students. While the tensions are not as palpable at Westfield, the experience of the Japanese student does confirm the importance of a cultural network. Westfield’s students mention peers as a natural source of pressure and competition; it is interesting that such characterization does not come out at Eastwood. The situation with peers at Eastwood seems to be marred by the demographic split of the program; such a division may be limiting the positive power of peers that shines at Westfield. Peers also play a role in the consideration of students’ experiences with career goals and on the job market.

### Career Goals and the Job Market

#### Eastwood

Of primary importance to both graduate school administrators and students is where students go once they finish their PhDs. In general, the dean at Eastwood did mention her concern about the state of the job market for new PhDs:

Because we know the job market is very constrained, we certainly don’t want to be out of sync with what is possible. Because obviously grad students, regardless of the kind of program they are in, are making an enormous commitment of their own time and resources, energies for a high level of training that they hope will of course translate into employment when they complete their degrees.

As we learned in the introduction to the department, the DGS talks about such issues with an eye for how they affect his program’s ranking. When students come in to the program they are always interested, first and foremost, in the placement of

graduates. The DGS talked about the different status of placements for new PhDs in economics:

You see most of the persons who are academically oriented want to do academic research. And primarily students who come into our program initially at least want to go into academic positions... so for them the US is of course the center for academic research, so at least their first job they would like to, most of the time, they would like to get a position in the US. If they cannot, then they would get a position somewhere else, and we have been successful in terms of placing them in other places, where the English has not been as much of a difficulty, and their hope is that after they establish themselves in the profession, to their research and teaching in the some of the non US places, that they can then try to come back to the U.S.

His words show a hierarchy that also speaks to the relative importance of the English language, depending on a student's ambitions. Karim looks at getting an academic job in the U.S. as getting lucky:

If I get that lucky I'd like to stay in U.S because U.S school is better than anywhere else. So, I prefer staying in a U.S university. Hopefully in a good one like Eastwood... it all depends on how I get through my PhD years.

For those who want to go on the academic job market, there is a clear concern about the job market paper and the role of research. Almost all of the students I talked to at Eastwood want to pursue an academic career, so research is of primary importance to them. As Peng says:

Yes, I feel a lot of pressure may be on research because now the department has suggested that now we should graduate in four years so that is to say we have to finish our dissertation and in the beginning of our fourth year so I think that is a challenge for us and also for job market yeah and for some reason the job market is not very good this year so we all worried about our future jobs.

Jia expresses a similar sentiment, and shows how all of these issues are tied in together:

I think the biggest challenge for me is myself, because I want to find an academic job that will be tough I have to study very hard so I, every day I tell myself you can't sleep too much, you have to study and you have many work to do, you have papers to finish, you have communicate with your advisor about your progress, I think that is the biggest pressure...

As Min says, "If I want to graduate, I must write a thesis. And if I want to get a job I have to sell my paper to find a job."

Students learn about the job market from watching senior students go through the process. Gang shares a story of one of the senior students who did not get a good job placement because of his English. So, while it seems that generally research and writing are more important than communication skills, on the job market some students may struggle. Gang and Raymond both talked about the role of English on the job market. Gang told me the story of a top candidate who did not get the best job placement because of his English:

There was a candidate in my department this year who did research very well but he has some language problem so the final placement was, is not as good as he think. Because I heard first they are considering about his research, he can be placed to the top, in the top ten universities but finally he just got a job [at a lower ranked school]. Of course that was also a very good university but it just cannot match his research, because of his language.

The student claimed the result of his job search was because of language, as everything else in his portfolio was very strong. While the department may not be sending a strong message about English, students learn from each other (peer knowledge) and from watching senior students go on the job market. Raymond made the same case:

Most people were from Asia, math geeks, so their techniques are superb and the normal American students cannot match with them on techniques but they can get better placement because of creativity and maybe because of their

presentation skill, how they present themselves as scholars and how they present their work.

Despite the focus on research and writing, it is clear that English language or oral communication skills can affect students' experiences on the job market. This situation will be analyzed in more depth in the language ideology chapter.

Raymond was the only student who had non-academic career goals at Eastwood. He is interested in a career in industry, and decided to do a PhD because an MBA was too expensive:

First of all I'm not going to be a professor, so I was considered by the law school, MBA or PhD. And PhD was free I didn't want the \$20,000 part when I graduated so I decided to do a few big steps, besides I was 24 when I applied. I think 23-24 when I applied if I wanted to get into that year and MBA program, I needed more work experience but what else can I afford with my work, that's why I got into PhD and I really wanted a free environment to pursue any study I wanted.

Raymond's interest in going in to industry colored his perceptions on other issues in his department. Raymond spent much of our interview discussing what he perceives as the shortcomings of his department. He seemed to be comparing his department to an MBA program; he complained that the department did not enforce guidelines, did not encourage networking, and did not insist upon high standards. He points out that there are several students who want to go into industry every year and they may feel left out:

For a person who wants to go into the industry, there are several every year, there will be, they will feel kind of left out. They got no resources, what the alumni are doing [is] to me more important than what other students are researching on.

Raymond's perspective does show that while most PhD programs in economics are organized around the expectation that students will go on the tenure track, there are students with other goals. How does the situation at Westfield compare?

Westfield

The dean at Westfield talked in general about current challenges in the job market and Westfield's concerns, much like the dean at Eastwood. The financial situation is clearly having an impact on graduate education:

Then obviously we've got students thinking about whether this is the right career when they arrive now, because it's the start of an education that's going to bring them out maybe 5-6 years from now, and will there be jobs on the job market? So, you've got students in the earlier part of their degrees thinking about whether they've made the right choice and then you've got students who are about to go on the job market who are suddenly finding that jobs are disappearing. So we've had a number of students tell me that they've been on the market and on the second round of interviews and suddenly jobs have gotten pulled. So a number of people are talking about well maybe they'll just spend another year here, and not finish the dissertation as they've planned.

Such a situation puts an added burden on the graduate school, because more students are in school at any given time, and the programs are rated based on their placement.

In the economics department, however, the impact has not hit. Neither the DGS nor the students expressed any concerns about the availability of jobs. The main concern in the economics department, that was articulated repeatedly, was the centrality of the job market paper. As Richie says:

It's very simple. Everyone knows it. There's only one thing to do, write a good job market paper... the whole decision depends on whether it's good or bad, most of the decision. So, it depends on the paper and it's evident even before you come to the school. I mean, that's the pre-qual.

Or, in Peter's words "I mean it's pretty clear how that process works. It's one paper."

Angelo, and other students all agree "Well, the idea is that you have to write one important paper. And that is going to be your ticket to get a job; and since we worked on a field for a few years, it's mostly our field going to be defined by the paper more than what we say." Hence, students feel great stress to do research, to talk to their advisors and to write a good paper. The attitudes about the job market paper seem to

color all other perspectives on the graduate program.

Angelo points out that the job market is only about the paper, not about research. Ron Bin says it does not matter how well he presents himself in the job market, what matters is his paper. Students across the board seem to understand that the entire point of their PhD years at Westfield is to write a good paper. More about this topic will be considered from the perspective of institutional theory in the institutional analysis section: the perspective on the job market paper is clearly a norm at Westfield that is not so uniformly articulated at Eastwood.

Consideration of the role of English language proficiency on the job market mostly shows that the research (and the paper) are of primary importance; everything else is gravy. The only exception to this attitude came from students who are considering positions in business schools. Richie, Peter and Matteo all mentioned that in business schools, teaching skills, presentation skills, and oral English proficiency will be more important to them than they would be in for a position in an economics department.

The DGS did mention one student who struggled on the job market because of his English language proficiency:

I did have one Korean student who had difficulty. Again, he had no difficulty writing, just speaking. He didn't get a, he got a job in Asia, he didn't get a job in the U.S. I think he wanted a job in the U.S. but he didn't get one. But he went back to Asia.

Despite the general perception at Westfield that the job market paper is the only key to getting a job, the DGS's comment does show that oral English language proficiency may be a factor, albeit a factor not freely discussed.

Again, the situation at both Eastwood and Westfield is quite similar with regard to the job market. The departments are organized around preparing students for

academic jobs, and their main responsibility to get such jobs is to write a good job market paper. While the expectations are the same at both universities, the students at Westfield articulated the importance of the paper more strongly and uniformly than those at Eastwood; they are getting a strong institutional message here that will be analyzed in more detail in the institutional analysis section. While English language proficiency may affect students' performance on the job market, it is generally secondary to the paper, and does not seem to be an issue the departments want to address. Finally, at both schools it is clear that there may be students with other career goals who figure out for themselves (or their advisors or peers) what the expectations might be if they pursue other career paths.

### Conclusion

Given such an expansive description of students' experiences in economics PhD programs at the two universities, what are the most important elements to bring forward into the theoretical analyses? The main issues shaping student experiences are funding needs, and consequently TA duties at Eastwood; the overall looseness of the system and the expectations that students will be both self-directed and intrinsically motivated, regardless of nationality or language background; the role of peers and demographics in the programs, and the role of the job market and therefore research and the job market paper as a driver for the system.

It is clear that funding is a basic need in graduate school, and the fact that Eastwood has more issues with funding is definitely affecting non-native English speaking students. In fact, it seems that this is the area of graduate school in which being a non-native English speaker matters the most, at least at Eastwood. Non-native speakers first have to pass the eligibility requirements, which the data has shown to be quite stressful, and then have to learn how to manage American undergraduates in the classroom. What also comes out very strongly is the relatively low status of teaching

at both universities. Teaching is important for funding, but otherwise a waste of time, even though it might be enjoyable. It is important to note that teaching is viewed simply as a way to fulfill basic needs, which is an interesting commentary on the entire university system. Teaching is the clear the crux of undergraduate education; students go to school to learn. At the same time, faculty and graduate students are there to do research. The problem is not new but it continues to be interesting; might other ways to organize universities not be more conducive to the goals of the different constituencies? The issue always returns to money; currently there is little funding without teaching, unless a department or program is as lucky as the one at Westfield.

Eastwood's reliance on TAships is definitely the biggest difference between the two departments, and will prove interesting for the institutional analyses: the economics PhD program at Eastwood is tightly tied to the graduate school on this particular issue, while Westfield's relative wealth means that there is no external intervention in students' experiences. Students are able to work as research assistants or have fellowships, which means they are not being regulated by any entity external to the department. One might argue, however, that the students at Eastwood are ultimately better off for having had the TA experience, as well as the experience of working on their English in the context of preparing to TA. This issue will continue to emerge throughout both the institutional and the language ideology analyses. The bifurcated view of teaching as necessary but insignificant to career development, and also as the one area in which English language proficiency is explicitly considered will continue to pervade the study.

While students at Westfield seem to have fewer native-language related issues because of the absence of a strict language policy, the security of their research funding, and more diverse demographics, their lives otherwise seem quite similar, which speaks to the power of the discipline. All of the students in the study are



struggling to find good research questions, to make sure they are doing good work, and to figure out how to write that all-important job market paper.

A specific focus on non-native English speaking international students puts the already complex graduate school environment in a new light. Hearing their voices on all of these topics is a powerful statement on the international nature of graduate school and the complexities inherent in such a nature. While students at Eastwood report that the main concern with non-native speakers is their ability (or inability) to hold TA duties, it is clear that their differences permeate other realms of the field that emerge at both universities. Students who are afraid to initiate conversations at professional conferences, who may not get good job placements or have varying levels of participation in their department cohort, or who feel that they only need to be able to write several clear sentences as long as their mathematical models are sound, are clearly shaping the face of the discipline.

This chapter has laid the foundation for the theoretical analyses. Looking at student experiences through both theoretical lenses will provide another perspective on them. In the next chapter, institutional theory will enable a more thorough consideration of the way that students figure out graduate school. From the process of finding an advisor, to learning about conducting, writing and presenting good research, it is clear that there are many unstated but understood norms and rules. At the same time, the discipline is shaping student experiences; apart from the graduate school intervention at Eastwood related to TA duties, students seem to very much on their own. Given such an environment, how do students figure things out, and how do their actions affect the system? The role of both advisors and peers will be considered in more detail then.

In Chapter 6, language ideology will enable a more focused consideration of the experience of non-native speakers. Looking at these student experiences through

the lens of language ideology enables an understanding of how important non-native speaker status is as a graduate student. The data shows the international nature of the field, and also how much some experiences seem to be universal to all students. At the same time, however, it is clear that non-native speakers are experiencing some parts of their programs differently. Specifically, how they may encounter differential treatment in various realms of interaction, from TA duties to interactions with professors and peers, will be more deeply analyzed. Similarly, language expectations based on the norms of the field and the difference between the more theoretical and applied subfields are more deeply considered. Ultimately, both analyses taken together will allow a more nuanced understanding of the role of international students in the US university system.

## CHAPTER 5

### INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS

Now that I have described and examined the experiences of economics graduate students studying at both Eastwood and Westfield, I now examine those experiences through the lens of institutional theory. I look specifically at the way university, departmental and disciplinary characteristics, rules and norms affect non-native English speaking graduate students' experiences and decisions, as well as how students manage such characteristics and their institutional components. Viewing graduate student experiences through the lens of institutional theory is valuable in that it allows for a consideration of the range of expectations and pressures acting on the academic discipline, the broader university system, the department, faculty and the actual graduate students. As is clear from much of the literature on graduate school (for example, Lovitts, 2007) much of what students are expected to learn is not explicitly stated in handbooks or on websites; rather it is expected that graduate students learn through participation in the system (taking courses, teaching and research experiences) as a means of socialization into the university and the academic discipline.

Recall Figure 1, presented in the introduction:

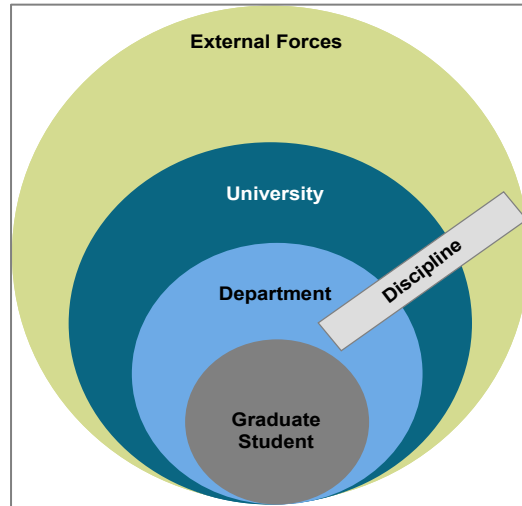


Figure 1: Context

Students are sitting in the middle of a very complicated system, and get messages from many different university constituents. How do they sort out and prioritize the messages? Which messages do they interpret as important or as not so important? Remember that the focus of the current study is on non-native English speakers. While their status as non-native speakers and issues around English language proficiency will be dealt with explicitly in the next chapter, their status as non-native speakers is expected to affect not only which messages they receive about how to be successful in graduate school, but also how they interpret and act on such messages. Because of the expectation that graduate school is an uncertain institutional environment, students might have some difficulty navigating the system.

Specifically, this chapter will answer these questions:

1. How do university, departmental, and disciplinary rules, norms, and deeply embedded patterns of logic shape non-native English speaking graduate students' experiences?
2. How do students navigate and influence such a system?

The lens of institutional theory will be used to consider students' experiences navigating the PhD process. Four main propositions, derived from both the

institutional theory literature and my professional experiences, will be examined:

1. Graduate school experiences are shaped by identifiable regulative, normative, and cultural cognitive elements; normative and cultural cognitive elements are likely to be more influential than regulative elements.
2. Departments and graduate students are more responsive to departmental and disciplinary expectations than to general university expectations.
3. Graduate school administration is decoupled from departments.
4. The graduate school student experience is an uncertain institutional environment.

Within each proposition, relevant student experiences described in detail in Chapter 4 will be analyzed in light of these theoretical considerations. These include: funding and TA duties; tension between research and teaching as well as PhD students' transition to research; general scholarly obligations, including learning to write and present for the field; finding and building a relationship with an advisor; the role of peers; and the job market and career goals. Analysis and consideration of relevant experiences for each proposition will help paint a clearer picture of the complicated system in which students must operate, as well as the ways that the university and disciplinary norms and rules impact their experiences at both Eastwood and Westfield. Viewing the data through the lens of institutional theory provides valuable insight into just how normative and taken-for-granted graduate school expectations are (i.e., not explicitly written down and communicated), how decentralized the particular universities in question are (i.e., centralized graduate school organization and operation is decoupled from the actual experiences and constraints of the graduate students), and how uncertain the environment is (i.e., that while the environment seems uncertain it actually functions under a specific set of clear, but informal rules).

## CODING

I developed codes for the four positions based on central tenets of institutional theory. Table 11 below shows the proposition, an example from the data, and the code.

Table 11: Institutional Coding

<b>Proposition</b>	<b>Example from the Data</b>	<b>Tenet of Theory/Code</b>
1. Graduate school experiences are shaped by identifiable regulative, normative and cultural cognitive elements; normative and cultural cognitive elements are likely to be more influential than regulative elements.	“All of us have to pass those exams first year in the department.” (Karim)	Regulative
	“Actually I didn’t formally talk to my advisor but ....I think basically he has agreed me to become his student” (Gang)	Normative
	“It just comes from the fact that we want them to succeed. It’s our job. We just want them to succeed.” (DGS, Westfield)	Cultural Cognitive
2. Departments and graduate students are more responsive to departmental and disciplinary expectations than to general university expectations.	“Definitely not from the university” (Paul)	Isomorphism
3. Graduate school administration is decoupled from departments.		Decoupling
4. The graduate school student experience is an uncertain institutional environment.	“You don’t really face any pressure except the feeling of being lost because there is nobody is telling you what to do” (Raymond)	

One of the original propositions, that peer universities have similar expectations of international graduate students, will be discussed in the conclusions, once it is clear what expectations universities do have of students.

## FINDINGS

Proposition 1: Regulative, normative and cultural cognitive elements of graduate school

This proposition seeks to explain how the components of graduate school navigation fit into the framework of institutional pillars laid out originally by Scott in 1995, and then updated in more recent versions (2008). Sipple (1999) places these pillars at the center of the definition of an institution: “a socially defined purpose around which normative, cognitive, and regulative structures emerge to provide stability and meaning to social behavior” (p. 451). The purpose here is to identify what elements of the graduate school trajectory for non-native English speaking economics PhD students are regulative (formal rules or regulations with repercussions for non-compliance), normative (widely accepted professional norms) and cultural cognitive (deeply embedded and socially defined taken-for-granted expectations) and how these constraints reduce uncertainty and provide meaning. For those familiar with the academic environment and its inherent traditions, it is not surprising to see that most of what is expected of PhD students is widely understood and enforced, as opposed to being formally regulated, or even explicitly stated.

*Eastwood University*

*Regulative and Normative Pillars*

*Qualifying exams/ Third year paper.*

The regulative elements at Eastwood mainly pertain to timing of the graduate degree. The non-negotiable features of the PhD program in Economics are taking the qualifying exams at the end of the first year, and writing and presenting a third year paper (which students usually write in their second year, and is sometimes referred to as the second year paper). Both the DGS and the students feel a considerable amount of pressure around these regulative items, as they are understood to be the absolutely required components of navigating the program.

The DGS explains the requirements of the program:

We have two years of coursework. The first year is compulsory coursework. The second year is in things that you are interested in, so you chose a major that you are interested in, or a major and two minors, and you do coursework over there....And then we ask them, this started 3 years back, this second/third year paper. They are supposed to start thinking about it in the spring semester of the second year. They are supposed to work on it through the summer, and then they are supposed to present it in the workshop in the fall semester of the third year. All of the students have to do this.

So, within the spectrum of flexibility students have with coursework in their second year, they have to write a paper, and they have to present it at the beginning of the third year. Karim, Jia and Yunjeong's comments are representative of the spectrum of pressures students feel around these requirements. Karim explains the system:

All of us have to pass those exams first year in the department. If you can't, and there are some levels of the exam if you get like pass minus then you can have a Masters Degree but you can't have PhD Degree. If you get more than pass minus then you can have (PhD) but also this grading in a way signal how strong you are to the faculty so then they know who they are dealing with, what kind of students we are. So yeah we have to pass those exams.

Jia also talks about the way the exam requirements are carried out:

So if you can't pass the qualifying exam course in August, you have to transfer to another department. This is a harsh policy, I can understand about it because they are trying to train students with those capabilities [and select out those who don't have them].

Yunjeong talks about her experiences with these rules, and particularly the stress she felt about the qualifying exams, as well as what she sees as mandatory in the paper:

For the first year, I always had a nightmare about the qualifying exams so if I failed the tests, I have to go back to my country Korea. So I was really stressed out with the exam and both end term, I passed the exams, now I have to write my second year paper because it is the mandatory coursework and I have to finish in this summer and I have to present the paper in this semester,



the first semester.

Students react to departmental requirements, and feel some pressure from them. For Yunjeong, in particular, not passing the exams would have meant that she would have had to go back to Korea. While the stakes are high for all graduate students, in some cases students from other countries may feel even more pressure in this regard. Her statement shows that students may feel increased pressure to comply with the system; the institutional lens here enables an examination of the different pressures that students face.

Other than these major milestones, students seem to have a lot of flexibility within the general requirements. This is the point at which the expectations become more normative. As Scott (2001) explains, normative systems “introduce a prescriptive, evaluative and obligatory dimension into social life” (p. 54). As opposed to the regulations and rule-setting that accompany the regulative pillar, normative systems suggest values and norms. Again, as Scott (2001) explains, “Values are conceptions of the preferred or the desirable.... Norms specify how things should be done; they define legitimate means to pursue valued ends” (p. 54-55).

In his further explanation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year paper, and the requirement that students present it, the DGS makes an interesting observation, which links explicitly to the tension in the institutional literature between the regulative and normative pillars:

There is a faculty person who has to supervise this research and to approve it, in terms of the third year paper and then they present it. I think it has worked remarkably well. They are eager to attend. It is compulsory, but we might as well drop compulsory. They want to attend it. They get feedback from faculty, but more important they get feedback from their classmates.

As the DGS says, they “might as well drop compulsory.” Norms that are perceived as legitimate are more likely to be institutionalized in normative practice, rather than

regulations that may or may not be accepted. In the case of the third year paper and presentation requirement, it has become successful in helping students, and thus it has become more than a regulation. Scott (2001) suggests that the strength of the normative pillar is connected to program success and perseverance; regulations alone do not promote legitimacy. Meyer and Rowan's (1977) discussion about institutionalism and legitimacy is also relevant here, specifically their proposition that "Organizations that incorporate societally legitimized rationalized elements in their formal structures maximize their legitimacy and increase their resources and survival capabilities" (p. 340). In this case the third year paper is a legitimizing normative element.

*ITA language requirement.*

An additional regulative element specific to the international students in the department is the English language proficiency requirement for ITAs. While other expectations are not really set in stone, it is clear that the TA requirement, and hence the English language proficiency requirement, is a non-negotiable element of life in the economics department. This is because of the importance of securing funding. While students may find a way to survive in the program without passing the requirement (as seen in Chapter 4 in the discussion of the grading option for students who are not able to hold full TA duties) it places a lot of stress on them.

The main explanations for the perceived power of the requirement are its connection with the students' funding as well as the solid position of the ITA program on campus. By this I mean that the department does not (or cannot) choose to ignore the requirement: it is a regulative element that has become legitimized and institutionalized. Because the department is depending on the graduate school for TAs and funding lines, there is no thought of trying to avoid the requirement. The requirement comes from the university administration, but is taken seriously.

From Chapter 4 we know that the DGS is concerned with the department's ability to provide funding and follow the English language requirement for TAs, and students are stressed out about their ability to fulfill the requirement. Recall Jia's account of his experience:

I found an email from my DGS, saying that we don't have any funding, so you have to pass the evaluation so that you can be a teaching assistant, you can hold a section, otherwise we have to force you to use out all your fellowships [normally reserved for dissertation writing]...I think that semester was like nightmare, because I had three courses to take, I had to do the readers job and I had to put a lot of effort on the English, so I think I slept a little for the whole of that semester. It was quite a nightmare.

Students are stressed by this regulation, but it is non-negotiable. Failure to complete the requirements can cause students to lose their funding, or be forced to go on leave. It is interesting to note that this regulation is perhaps more strictly enforced than any other element of students' graduate study. In an atmosphere of general flexibility, the English language proficiency requirement almost seems out of place. This will be discussed further in the conclusion of this section.

Apart from the general milestones that mark students' progress, as well as the English language proficiency requirements for ITAs, there are not many firm regulations at Eastwood; instead there are many unwritten rules that fall under both the normative and cultural cognitive pillars. My interview with the DGS of the department, as well as student perceptions, inform the balance between the regulative and normative elements at play in the department at Eastwood. Students should find an advisor in the second year, and many of them do not. Students should also plan to graduate within four years, and many of them do not. They understand that it is an expectation, but it is not really an official rule. The norm seems to be to not follow the expectations precisely.

One might wonder why the system works in this way. There are two main, related responses to this question. One is that the clear priority in the department is research, and students may take longer if it takes them longer to identify their research question and plan. Their choices are shaped and constrained by the need to do good work: To write research papers and stay on the path to career placement; other expectations take a back seat. Faculty operate in much the same way; they follow departmental rules to the extent that they have to, but find flexibility where they need it, especially when they are working on important research agendas. Students take longer and stay longer as a result of putting their research first. For example, were the regulations more important, the norm would be to finish within a certain time at the expense of quality research. Secondly, the system has already been established in this way and will persist in this way. Students observe that senior students do not always follow these expectations and they perceive minimal repercussions. They also observe faculty treatment of the requirements. Student commentary on this issue is telling, and can be organized around key experiences from Chapter 4, namely finding an advisor, as well as time to degree and the supremacy of the job market paper.

*Advisor relationship.*

While finding an advisor seems like a non-negotiable rule in a PhD program, student commentary shows that it is not a black and white issue. Ultimately, students must have an advisor to sign off on their work; in this sense it is regulative. At the same time, however, the issues surrounding the advisor relationship, as well as the timing of securing the advisor is normative. In this regard it does not seem that the nationality or first language of students is important; they look for an advisor that will help them with their research goals. Students in their second and third years do not necessarily have an advisor officially secured despite the expectation that they should. As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, the priority is research, and students

need to figure out what they want to do before they can make the best choice of advisor. Keith, for example, talks about the lack of pressure to find an advisor, despite the expectation that he should do so:

I think one of the biggest problems that we have in our department is sort of the lack of...not structured but I think it's often the case that there really is just nobody looking up for what we are doing. I mean they may not feel like that's that way but I think that's how we perceive it is that you know I don't think most of the department knows what I spend my time on. And so do I feel pressured to pick someone at a specific time? Not really. I mean there's a few people who are trying to improve and they get more structured and more focused and you know you should have an advisor at this point but I mean I could easily come up with an excuse to why that didn't happen and they would have no basis to evaluate whether or not that was true.

The shaping message here is independence. The implication is that students need to figure out how to navigate the system on their own; like faculty, no one is really directing them or regulating their behavior. A system of oversight of graduate students would operate contrary to the norms of the field. Gang's experience again shows that finding an advisor may not be as formal a process as one might expect:

Actually I didn't formally talk to my advisor but I join his workshop every week and ask him to read my proposal for my second year so I think basically he has agreed me to become his student but since we still haven't had the pressure to find the committee members until now, so I think we still have time to find other committee members.

Gang thinks she has secured an advisor, but she is not sure. Her case is a good example of what seems like an ambiguous system, but one which will likely work out.

At the same time, Pablo's experience shows some potential effects of this flexibility. Students may think they have an advisor lined up, but then change their minds. As Pablo says:

I had an advisor lined up until last semester but this semester I haven't really been doing that much work, so it's basically, it's kind of like in present agreement that I do have an advisor so, at least for our department, you do ask specifically to a professor... But I guess it's kind of like a courtship in a sense that you go to a lot of related people working in this field and talk about ideas and then like graduate, he just becomes your advisor or she just becomes your advisor. But, so I don't have an official advisor but it's pretty much set through that.

Pablo's explanation here actually really connects to the perspective on advisors at Westfield, as will become clear in that section. Your advisor is the person who is supervising you when you graduate; perhaps other professors will help you along the way. Thus, while some might feel that advisors are a regulative element of graduate school (and they clearly are, in the end), the way it works in economics seems to be much more flexible.

Such a flexible system benefits students in the ways that Pablo mentions: they get to interact and speak with many different professors about their research interests, and they are not necessarily locked in to working with a particular person. Ideally, this allows students to find the best match, and to be able to do their best work. Clearly such flexibility could also be perceived as ambiguity, and could cause trouble for students who perhaps need more guidance or who have trouble securing an advisor. There is also inherently more burden placed on the DGS, as he may become students' default advisor. For the most part, though, students at Eastwood did not report any problems with the flexibility of the system.

#### *Time to degree.*

Students make very similar points when talking about the overall expectations of the degree and time to degree. As Gang says, "I think the pressure is just from each person themselves because actually if you stay in the department for more than six years no one will push you to leave." Andres agrees, and expresses some frustration

with his classmates and their adherence to the expectations:

I mean the department is really transparent with the requirements in the processes to the degree so it says in the first year you have to take these courses and the second year you have to pick this other courses in the third year you have to do your exams and affirm your committee and right now as far as I know, just one guy has taken the exam out of 18 or something like that. Most of them don't even had a chairperson from the committee. So people get some way loose.

As he says, people get “loose”; they are not necessarily diligently trying to follow departmental expectations. While Andres is a bit frustrated with this phenomenon--he seems to wish students held themselves to higher standards--comments from students like Pablo show they may benefit from the flexibility of the system, or at least are not troubled by its ambiguities. The purpose here is not to judge the viability of the lack of regulations in the department, but to examine how they play out, why such flexibility exists and to whose benefit. While it seems counterintuitive to ignore norms and rules, given the priorities of the system it really make sense. Academia works in this way because of perceived flexibility needed to do good research. There is also the perception that forcing completion is not possible, and would definitely be contrary to the way things work in the department.

### *Cultural Cognitive Pillar*

It is inherently difficult to talk about the cultural cognitive pillar, as these are the elements of an institution that are so taken for granted that people do not even recognize much less talk about them. Ways to judge cultural cognitive elements vary; how can one really know if an element of an institution is normative or cultural cognitive? When I ask a question and the person looks at me blankly, or like I have three heads for even asking, to me that signifies a cultural cognitive element.

The job market paper sits at the cusp between the normative and cultural

cognitive pillars at Eastwood. Students know that they have to write a good job market paper to be successful, but it is not as ingrained in their minds as it is for students at Westfield. As Min says “If I want to graduate, I must write a thesis. And if I want to get a job I have to sell my paper to find a job.” She knows this explicitly and is able to articulate it. While her statement is true across all economics programs, and maybe even all PhD programs in general, she states it like a norm, though it is bordering on a taken for granted assumption. That is just the way things work. Min’s explicit statement here means that in some ways these elements of the program are still normative, however. Truly cultural cognitive elements are not even discussed, and would be difficult to articulate. As Scott (2001) points out, “for cultural-cognitive theorists, compliance occurs in many circumstances because other types of behavior are inconceivable; routines are followed because they are taken for granted as ‘the way we do these things.’” (p. 57).

For this reason, issues around English language proficiency are also not cultural cognitive. Language skills are actually not a taken-for-granted element of PhD study in economics. While an outsider to the university environment might take it for granted that PhD students have strong English skills, it is clear at Eastwood that such English ability is not taken for granted. Both the Dean, the DGS, and the students all articulate issues that non-native speakers face, as well as the relative lack of importance of English language skills, particularly in certain subfields of economics. More about attitudes around English language proficiency will be discussed in the next chapter

Other general cultural cognitive elements here likely exist in all top tier economics programs. Students should work hard and learn from their advisors and peers. Students learn how to write by reading and how to give presentations by attending presentations. The programs are designed with the assumption that students



want to pursue academic careers; it is taken for granted that students want to go into academia. None of these revelations is surprising. What is taken for granted, though, is that students will push themselves to succeed, and that external pressure is not required. More about students' own pressure on themselves will be discussed in the next propositions about decoupling and isomorphism.

### *Westfield University*

#### *Regulative/Normative Pillars*

Similar to the situation at Eastwood, the regulative elements of the PhD program at Westfield have to do with the timing of exams and the steps students must pass to progress to the degree. After the first year of study students must take general exams, like the qualifying exams at Eastwood, and after the second year of study students must take oral exams specific to their chosen field. In the third and fourth years students must participate in workshops and give a presentation at least once a semester. The formation of the committee and naming of an advisor is also tied to this timetable, but both students and the DGS indicate that the real requirements are the exams and the presentations. While Peter's attitude may seem cynical, he captures the essence of the regulative elements that actually require you to be on campus:

If you really want to limit your number of physical obligations as much as possible, the only thing that you actually have to show up for ...you have to show up for your general exams, show up for your field (oral) exams. You have to present once a term in year three and four. You have to defend your dissertation. I mean, if you really blew out everything, I think you can show up in campus 10 times in five years without running into actual trouble.... I mean, there are very few actual formal requirements that they call out.

Peter's comments reveal a general flexibility present in the department at Westfield. Certain regulations are in place to provide some structure to the graduate program, but they are minimal. A minimal number of formal regulations are essential to the

legitimacy of the program, but the value placed on flexibility and research carry the success of the programs. Institutionalism makes it clear that what might be perceived as the main requirements of the program are actually not really at the heart of the way the department works; students must be able to figure this out in order to operate in the world of economics. An exploration of student and DGS perceptions of exams, the naming of an advisor, and the job market paper allow for further exploration of the regulative and normative elements of the PhD program at Westfield.

### *Exams.*

Students express stress about the exams at Westfield; as Carlos says, “It was stressful.” At the same time, however, discussion about the exams at Westfield is a bit different from Eastwood. It seems understood that students do not fail the exams. Unlike Eastwood, there is no fear that students will be asked to leave. Peter, Matteo, and Angelo all talk about the stress around the exams, despite the understanding that students at Westfield do not get asked to leave. As Peter says:

After second year we’ll do field exams and work to our specialty. Some people spend a month and a half completely stressed out preparing for that even though everyone always passes it. And it feels silly.

Such a perspective on exams illustrates a central tenet of institutionalism; the exam requirement is actually decoupled from the act of taking the exam. It almost seems as though at Westfield, the exam requirement is in place as a legitimacy-seeking element; what actually happens during the exam is less important. Recall Meyer and Rowan’s (1977) central argument: “institutionalized organizations protect their formal structures from evaluation on the basis of technical performance” (p. 357). In this case students’ actual performance on the exams may not even be inspected; what is important is that they take the exams. Otherwise, how can it be explained that no one

ever fails?

The experiences of Matteo and Angelo provide further evidence for this institutional argument. Matteo seemed to take the exams seriously, but he was also aware that everyone passes:

And then you know I did very well but just to tell you, the week before, I do stress out and I make sure. The week before the exam, I can't sleep for a week. I slept like 40 minutes a night because I went to bed, I stayed eight hours in bed, I couldn't sleep. I saw the clock ticking right ... Everyone in our department remembers me, how green I was because I was terrible, terrible. Then you realize you're not going to be out because they don't kick out anyone here.

When questioned about how he knows that people do not get dismissed from the program he explained:

People drop out because they get depressed or stressed or stuff but like if you fail your generals you have another chance and if that goes bad also, but it never goes bad, but if it happens, it goes bad you might get a third chance and so on....And then there's no possibility of kick-out. One girl was kicked out because she got crazy or something like that but it just doesn't happen.

Again, when asked how he knew, he said he just knew. You just do not get asked to leave. In this sense the exams evoke ideas of ritual and ceremony (Meyer & Rowan, 1977); they exist because they are expected to exist. Angelo also talked about his understanding that students do not get dismissed from the program, and the general lack of stress he feels in the program:

There are programs which are much more stressful because they are exams that if you don't pass, you're automatically excluded from the program, or there are structures that are very fixed. In Westfield, there are no people are sent away. You're kind of free to do whatever you want.

In this case, the exams are regulative in the sense that students must take them, but the normative piece is that students pass them, or are given another chance in extreme cases. The idea of just knowing in this case is cultural cognitive. You just know that students will not be dismissed. In this sense the regulation may be perceived as more of a formality or legitimacy-seeking ritual. Carlos explains more about the requirements:

At the beginning of the third year, it was tough because I had to prepare oral examinations, which is the next important requirement from the department. Once you passed that, you get your master's degree. And so I studied tough for those. The requirement is that after you pass your orals, you have one year to form your committee to give your proposal, your thesis proposal or your dissertation proposal.

When talking about the timeline, the rules become a little more flexible, as they did at Eastwood. Carlos knew that despite the expectations, he could proceed on his own timeline:

From the department, the pressure I had like deadlines that you have to take your orals by this date and so on. But it was not really pressure for me from the department itself. I would have felt bad if I did, taking more time...

What is interesting here is that Carlos perceives the pressure from himself; despite the rules and expectations set out by his department, Carlos knows it is up to him to follow them, which again will come up in the discussion of decoupling and isomorphism, and also connects to the issue of the naming of an advisor at Westfield. The institution is successful in the sense that it is in fact working to build student autonomy consistent with how they will need to be able to perform as economics scholars or faculty members.

*Advisor relationship.*

At Eastwood it was clear that for some students the advisor may not be set until the end of the degree, but for the most part, students there named an advisor in the second or third year. At Westfield, fewer students have a formal advisor until it comes time for the final job market paper. In this sense, naming an advisor at Westfield becomes even less regulative than it is at Eastwood. Clearly at the end of the program, an advisor is needed, but up until last stage, there is no formal rule about it. As the DGS explains:

Well it's essentially almost every committee member is an advisor. We have a formal chair eventually, but it's actually not known a priori necessarily who's the chair. It's really up to the students. They can go around and talk to people for 2-3 years, and then at the last moment decide who's the chair. I would say that everybody who advises a student advises a student.

As we saw at Eastwood, in this way the students have the benefit of interacting with any number of faculty, and getting advice from different people. They are not locked in too early to a faculty member that might not be the best match. At the same time, however, the flexibility does have some drawbacks for students who may not be as proactive as the department would like. The DGS does acknowledge that there are sometimes problems with this loose system; students may get lost if they are not being directly supervised:

So we have instituted this formal procedure whereby they are required to submit a prospectus, signed by, I don't remember the number, maybe 2-3 faculty members. This is not exactly a research proposal. It can be a 2-3 page document which outlines the topic in which they are interested and want to do some work. But the key is that it forces them to go to somebody and talk to them in order to get a signature. By talking with some number of faculty members, they become at least attached to some extent. And if the conversations are good they might develop some research supervised by one of these people. This formal procedure works to some extent. Actually it works pretty well I would say. But of course it hasn't eliminated all people who have

difficulty. So we try to identify them. We have every, once a year or twice a year now, we survey the students to see with whom they work. We have a faculty meeting in which we report these attachments and try to verify with faculty members that indeed they know the students who are supposedly attached to them. And if we find students who maybe submitted a prospectus but then didn't go back to talk to anybody for 6 months or so we contact them and try to find out what's happened and we encourage them to tighten these connections.

The DGS's words here show that the department is trying to put some more regulative structures in place around a very loose system. It seems to be problematic for those students who are floundering or struggling to make progress. Even the fact that the DGS does not know whether two or three faculty need to sign the students' prospectus is telling. The rules are not institutionalized; they have been imposed to help motivate students to follow the expectations and prevent them from getting lost. His description of the way the faculty meeting runs is also telling. Once or twice a year they look into the issue to make sure students are not truly lost or completely unattached; six months can pass before they realize that a student is off track. As Peter said, faculty members may or may not know anything about what students are doing, and students could get away with not even being on campus.

Students explain their experiences in this flexible system. As Angelo says:

I do have an advisor, but it may not be the main one at the end. But yeah, I do.... And so it would be decided, more or less, later on when I'll be actually working on my job market paper.

Carlos makes a very similar point:

At that point, once I'm sure about it, probably I would be there to change the advisor if the person I'm talking to or the one I feel that is more prepared or knows more about the topic. So I would pick that advisor. So it might be the same, it might be different. Then I will have to make this committee of three people.

None of the students in the study reported being lost in the system; they seem to understand that they have to look out for themselves and they realize that despite the flexibility present in the program, in the end it all works out. The lesson students are learning in these departments, for better or for worse, is autonomy. As Peter says “I mean it’s so very informal but it ends up working out.” Peter’s comment underlines the value and power of norms; the department at Westfield shows that formal rules may not be necessary for success given a loose structure, but they are needed for legitimacy and to give some formal structure to the program.

*Job market paper.*

It seems that one of the reasons the normative pillar is so powerful is because of the power of the job market paper. It is commonly understood at Westfield that almost the entire point of the program is for students to write a good job market paper and get a job. The job market paper at Westfield has reached taken for granted status at Westfield, but it would not fit into the cultural cognitive pillar simply because its importance is easily articulated. The job market paper is driven by the strict job market system in the field of economics, which, while part of the normative pillar, is so institutionalized it is almost regulative. The DGS explains the way they job market works:

I know this isn’t very common but in economics there is a well-organized job market. So basically what happens is the students submit their packages to various universities in the late fall. Then during the meeting of the American Economics Association, which takes place in early January, they are interviewed by schools which are interested in them. So you know they send out packages to maybe 100 schools, maybe 80 schools. Then the schools which become interested, to some degree in students, invite them to interviews. So they get interviewed. And among those the school interviews, they choose a smaller number to come and give seminars, we call that fly outs. So this takes place in Jan and Feb. And then after these presentations the departments make offers. So this is the structure.

The norms of the job market affect the way students learn about the job market paper; it is almost a rule. As Matteo says:

You get it from the first day. The professors on the first day, they say the only thing that matters is your job market paper. Do whatever you want, just write the paper. Write a good paper. Find your way to it. If you want to not study, don't study for the exams. The only thing important is at the end is you find what you like....Officially, it's just the rules of the game. Then of course you need to know stuff. But that's a requirement to write a good job market paper.

At Westfield it seems that the norms in the department, largely based on the job market paper, are much stronger than the formal regulations. Apart from taking the exams and presenting on their research in the third and fourth years, students are very much on their own. The idea is that by being independent students will have time to do good research that will lead them to success; in this way they are socialized to the profession and what it is like to be an economics faculty member. My research indicates that the process occurs for students in much the same way for all students, regardless of nationality or native language.

Unlike at Eastwood, the English language regulation for teaching assistants at Westfield does not have much power. The lack of importance of the English language policy has to do with the relative newness of the policy, but also the department's financial status. Because students do not need to worry about funding from teaching assistantships, and we already explored the relative lack of importance of teaching, students do not have to worry about the English language policy. In this regard the departments really are quite different. The key regulative element in place at Eastwood for non-native speaking students is not present at Westfield. More about the implications of this key difference will be discussed in the conclusion of this section and this chapter, as well as in the overall conclusion of the study.



### *Cultural Cognitive Pillar*

In some ways the commentary around the cultural cognitive pillar at Westfield is the same as at Eastwood. Students are expected to learn by doing; to write by reading and to give presentations by attending other presentations. It is understood that students will do what they need to do to proceed in the program. The lack of regulations in the department shows the power of the norms and the fact that the system is just expected to function well with minimal oversight. At the same time, however, more data from Westfield supports other components of the cultural cognitive pillar that explain the way of thinking behind much of academia. It is all part of the larger goal of doing good research and producing good students who do good research. While the regulative frameworks exist for legitimacy, the taken-for-granted assumption is that you are working toward success, which exists within a general regulative framework but is quite separate from it.

The DGS's commentary here illustrates such cultural-cognitive ideals:

But the pressure of why do we want them to succeed, I, it just comes from the fact that we want them to succeed. It's our job. We just want them to succeed. You succeed if you manage to do some great research, you succeed if you manage to produce some high profile students who do great research, and so on. So it's part of the professional status. It's unavoidable. But I think it goes beyond that, because if you train grad students, and you invest in them a lot of time and effort, you really want them to succeed. I mean why would you do this? When you cook a dish and you invest a lot of time you want it to succeed too.

His expression, that is unavoidable, that it is just the way it is, indicates a deeper value of why top faculty do the work they do, and what they expect from students. Similarly, he is considering me strangely for even asking, as was evident in his tone when he made the analogy to cooking. Why would you do this? It is simply the way things work. You just do it that way.

While at Eastwood issues around English language proficiency should not be characterized as cultural cognitive, in that they were often openly discussed, especially by non-native English speakers, the situation at Westfield was quite different. Because the language requirement is not discussed, and is clearly decoupled from the department (it exists at an administrative level to which the department does not appear to pay attention), cultural cognitive ideas about English language proficiency expectations emerged. When I asked students about the importance of English language proficiency at Westfield, two of them expressed reasons that can be characterized as cultural cognitive, one assuming that it was important (Carlos) and the other thinking that it was not (Matteo). Carlos said that it is “common sense” that graduate students should know English. In his opinion, English language proficiency is not discussed because it is understood to be important: there is no reason to talk about it. Many people would likely believe Carlos. He chooses to interpret the lack of message about the importance of English to be the simple result of a common understanding. On the other hand, Matteo expresses the opposite interpretation of the lack of messages about English. He thinks that English language proficiency is not important because:

I figured that no one ever, ever, talks of anyone ever being penalized by not speaking. You all know who speaks well and who does not speak well, right? I heard last about the Japanese guy who people said was penalized by not speaking very well English....But that's the only case I ever heard of anyone talking about that stuff.

The contrast here is interesting. What is taken for granted may not be taken for granted by everyone. While the department does not talk about English language proficiency, and some elements of it are taken for granted, the attitudes in Chapter 6 will show that Matteo's perspective is more in line with that of the department as a

whole: English language proficiency is not discussed because it is not perceived to be important.

Matteo also expresses a taken-for-granted idea about what fields students choose. When I asked him why American students tended to study labor as opposed to the more theoretical areas, he said “Because it’s a fact of life.” Again, that’s just the way it is. Americans study labor. This partly can be explained by citizenship requirements for access to census data, which is often used in labor research, but also speaks to some underlying assumptions about what students study in specific economic subfields. The discussion of why the subfields tend to break down by nationality is interesting, and will be discussed in great detail in the next chapter. Yunjeong’s comments on this issue hint at that discussion:

I notice that many famous people in this field, I mean the percentage of Chinese, I mean the percentage of Asian people in econometrics is much higher than other people because I think econometrics is the field quite related to statistics and mathematics and many Americans students don’t want to chose such fields as their major because they don’t think econometrics is very related to the major main stream of economics, they cannot tell stories, they cannot find interesting stories in econometrics because we just analyze data and use those mathematical or statistical tools so and even some American students find difficulty in mathematics that makes them to isolate from the field of econometrics.

Stereotypes, like the ones you see in Yunjeong’s words are almost taken for granted in both departments, though they have a rationale behind them. Chinese students are good at math so they do econometrics. Much more about the role of English in the different subfields will be discussed in Chapter 6.

### *Summary*

An analysis of the pillars of institutions in both departments reveals how little of a PhD student’s graduate program is constrained and shaped by regulative constraints and rules. The regulations surround the passing of exams and the general

trajectory that students are expected to follow. Apart from the general rules, much of what is expected of students is normative. It is simply the way that students are supposed to behave, which is learned by watching faculty, senior students and peers. The importance of English language proficiency is not taken for granted, and if it is, it should not be.

The main differences between the two departments have to do with the English language regulation at Eastwood, as well as the variation between the way students perceive exams and the stakes of their work in graduate school. The strong regulative constraint around English language proficiency for TAs at Eastwood is out of place in an otherwise flexible system, (especially because it comes from the graduate school instead of the discipline) and the reasons that it works (i.e. is constraining) will be discussed in the next section. It is not decoupled, despite an expectation that it might be. One might expect that the regulation and power tied to the policy for international students may tie in to other attitudes students have about the department. It seems, though, that students are able to learn and react to the rules as well as the norms; the English language requirement is separate from other elements of the program.

There are two different arguments that can be made about which students are better off: those at Eastwood who experience the intervention related to their readiness to hold TA duties, and those at Westfield who do not. Those who believe in the value of a well-rounded graduate student, who is interested in more than a narrow research focus, would likely say that students at Eastwood, who are required to engage in an intervention (or at least an assessment) to check their English language proficiency, are in fact helped by the intervention. This is so despite the limited view of English language proficiency policy (that it is only necessary to secure TA duties), such students will benefit in the long run. On the other hand, a very research-oriented individual could make the argument that it has been shown that technical skills, at

least at top institutions like Eastwood and Westfield, are in fact far more important than other skills including language ability or teaching, and that time spent on teaching or efforts to improve language really are not relevant to top economics scholars' career trajectory. At the same time, it seems impossible to argue that a little time spent away from research for the purposes of building communication skills is wasted time. Students should be encouraged to broaden their horizons, particularly in graduate school, and in the long run students at Eastwood may be better prepared for a more diverse set of future career options. Even if students do stay on a competitive research path, surely some time spent on communication skill development would be seen as a benefit. Much more on this issue will be exposed in the following chapter, and will again be a main point to return to in the conclusion of the study.

Students at Westfield seem to have a more relaxed attitude toward the entire process of navigating graduate school, and particularly of their qualifying exams. For the most part, despite my expectation that a norm-based program would be more difficult for non-native English speaking students to navigate, it seems not to be the case at either university. While non-native speakers may struggle with different aspects of the requirements (like TA duties, for example) they do not seem to struggle to know how they should be spending their time. Both domestic and international students at both schools are expected to figure out the system, and they seem to. The system works, as evidenced by its persistence and its relative similarity in both departments. As discussed earlier, the system is working to prepare autonomous students who will go on to be autonomous faculty. The hoops are in place largely to signal legitimacy, and at Eastwood, to secure funding for international students. Learning the norms and rules of the discipline, within these specific departments, is part of becoming acculturated to the discipline, and learning disciplinary priorities. Understanding that such flexibility is discipline-based (at least that in both

departments for the most part the norms are the same, and are driven by the structure of the job market in economics) and depends on the expected pressure that students themselves feel to be successful, connects well to an exploration of the next propositions about decoupling and isomorphism.

Proposition 2: Responsiveness to University/Disciplinary Expectations

Proposition 3: Decoupling between Graduate School Administration and Departments

These propositions will be considered together because of how connected they are. Both propositions are related to decoupling and isomorphism, and build upon the theme discussed in the previous proposition: graduate programs are largely based on norms, or normative values, as opposed to strict regulations. The question answered here is where those values originate and why they persist. In short, decoupling and legitimacy-seeking behavior help the organization survive, persist, and secure resources.

The perspective on where the power lies in a university depends on your position. As discussed in Chapter 2, faculty in one department may have more in common with faculty at another institution in the same field than with faculty from the same institution in a different field (Kuh, 2003). The rationale for the disciplinary orientation of this study comes from the very field-based nature of graduate school. At the same time, however, each university has its own central administration, and all graduate programs have their own umbrella administration. The local context of institutions cannot be ignored (Sipple, 1999; Bridwell-Mitchell, 2007). At both Eastwood and Westfield there is a graduate school that oversees what happens in the individual departments, and how much that plays out in each department will be examined here.

Specifically, the question of whether the economics departments are decoupled from the graduate school administration will be addressed here. As discussed earlier

in the chapter, institutionalism suggests that organizations tend to protect their technical core from evaluation; in this case what actually happens in the departments is the technical core, which is expected to be decoupled from the administration. The other piece of the puzzle is the disciplinary pressure on departments, and how that plays out with students. The way to get at this piece of institutional theory is to examine the pressures on each department, their sources, and how they are articulated by both the DGS and the students.

At the same time, the other theoretical element at play here is isomorphism, a force on organizations within the same field to adopt similar and legitimated forms and processes (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This concept and phenomenon is important in trying to explain similar organizational structure and process across different organizations – especially when the technical core activity of the organization is not subject to pure market forces. The main types of isomorphism are mimetic (imitating peer organizations), coercive (responding to cultural expectations of the external environment), and normative (responding to professional organizations). Analysis of what types of isomorphism exist at both Eastwood and Westfield will help inform the institutional environment as well as the way non-native speaking students experience it. In order to explore the data from both Eastwood and Westfield, I will examine the pressures faced in the department as well as the sources of such pressure, as I look at the different types of isomorphism present.

#### *Eastwood University*

When talking, in general, about the pressures the dean faces in the graduate school administration, the dean at Eastwood talked first about funding. Of course, even during strong financial times, funding is always a top issue that graduate schools face. As she says, “one of the big questions for not only Eastwood, but higher ed at large, is how are we going to pay for graduate students’ educations.” Apart from

funding, she acknowledges right away that a main pressure is to stay competitive:

Well, certainly we want to maintain our standing as a leading institution, and there is clearly that. And we don't want to fall behind in any way in terms of what we are doing... But there are those kinds of industry wide pressures, or peer pressures from within what we consider our peer groups. For an institution as large as Eastwood I have learned that the peer group is not the same all across the institution... So you do have to think of those kinds of things. I think to think of sort of venn diagrams, with overlapping circles. So if we think of the different colleges or the different fields, how their peer groups overlap may be different from discipline to discipline.

Her comments illustrate the concept of mimetic isomorphism; the graduate school has to look at what peers are doing in order to stay competitive. At the same time, her comments highlight, for large universities, that the peer groups may be different depending on the discipline. The power of the discipline is almost more important than the status and power of the overall university. Her comments connect directly with the pressure the DGS in economics feels to stay competitive within the field of economics.

The DGS at Eastwood is clearly under a lot of pressure, also related to funding and staying competitive. When I asked him about this he laughed:

The pressure? Tremendous. The DGSs job starts from getting students admitted to the program and then seeing them all the way to getting good jobs and finishing the dissertation. It never really stops. You are kind of seeing their progress through the program all along.

He identifies several main areas of pressure: wanting the students to do well, maintaining the standards of the program, and having enough funding for students:

There is the pressure of seeing ... you want them to do well in the program. At the same time you want to maintain the standards of the program. Often you are faced with this difficulty where if you want to maintain the standards of the program you have to do the screening, you have to let the students who have



the promise of finishing the thing stay on. And others you have to let go. This is difficult and it comes early in the program, in terms of the end of the first year, qualifying exam and things of that sort. Then the other big headache is the funding. There is a certain amount of the funding which is in my control, but there is a substantial part of it which is not in my control.

When talking about funding, the pressure is worse for foreign students:

And I think the pressure is even more for foreign students than for American students in that respect because consider the scenario, this is a real one. We expect students to finish in 5 years. They often don't. They are making very good progress but they don't go on the job market in the 5<sup>th</sup> year so they are staying on an additional year: what do you do? For a foreign student it poses a real problem; if we cannot support the student he basically has to leave, not only Eastwood but also the country. For an American student we can ask the student to go on leave of absence, and then come back and finish the dissertation... So we don't have contracts beyond the 5 years, at the same time there are these kinds of situations arising all of the time. I don't have control over this.

When asked about the source of this pressure, the DGS mainly points to the discipline, the ranking as compared to other programs:

Not from the university itself, because we kind of, because we exchange information all of the time we naturally feel a pressure, right? You would want to be able to place your students in good places. I mean because look at this faculty member down the corridor, he placed his student in a good place and so I should be able to, and so on. So there's that natural thing, but yeah in terms of the field. You are conscious about the ranking of the econ dept...you are conscious about the ranking of our field in the profession, how it is viewed from the outside. It directly impacts admissions. You look at placement and then you look at admissions. We look at it of course in the same semester. Every student who visits over here before taking our offer always asks me "what's your placement"... The pressure is more in terms of the profession, recognition in the profession.

The power of the discipline, as the DGS says, "recognition in the profession," clearly connects with the concept of normative isomorphism. He is leading the program in a way that he believes will help it be competitive in the professional arena, based on the

professional field. While some of the funding comes from the Graduate School and the local university environment, the main source of pressure to succeed comes externally from the profession, which serves to shape and constrain the decisions of the department and faculty.

Similarly, students do not feel pressure from the graduate school, and surprisingly most reported not feeling too much pressure from faculty, either. Like the DGS, students feel pressure to do good work and proceed well so that they will be competitive in seeking a faculty position in economics in a top tier department. Some students get that message from the advisor and others get it from themselves or from peer students. Of course, those students with issues with the language requirements for ITAs felt pressure about funding, as discussed in Chapter 4, but other than that, the most commonly reported source of pressure at Eastwood was from the individual students pressuring themselves. Students seem to be attuned to the expectations of their disciplines in terms of what they should be doing. As Jia explains:

I don't feel pressure from the university, but I do feel the pressure from my department, my advisor, and from myself. I think, I don't know, I think the biggest challenge for me is myself, because I want to find a secondary job that will be tough. I have to study very hard so I, every day I tell myself you can't sleep too much, you have to study and you have many work to do, you have papers to finish, you have communicate with your advisor about your progress, I think that is the biggest pressure...

Other students also discuss the pressure they put on themselves. As Andres says "If you really want to get through you have to do things on your own, you know nobody is going to come and tell you, 'you have to do this,' I really believe that." Karim expresses the same ideas perhaps even more forcefully:

So it comes from myself. I mean no one tells me okay, start doing this stuff so, no one does this in PhD only yourself. You have to make your mind, you have

to choose your area of interest, choose those courses according. I mean you can't always consult with professors purely and basically you are on your own by choosing those kinds of things [that prepare you for the field] and this pressure comes from myself.

Pablo and Li make very similar points. As Pablo says:

I wouldn't say from the department, I think it's more personal pressure in the sense that, I think everybody goes through this but I think at this point you are expected to do research. So kind of like everybody thinks well I am not doing enough ... So I guess the pressure is more an internal thing.

Li also talks about internal pressure:

I really want to do some really interesting and meaningful research and I think it is the pressure from myself, it is not from outside, right.

Students seem to realize that their success is dependent on the pressure they put on themselves and their own internal motivation to be competitive in the field. When asked about the pressures from the graduate school, students most often looked at me blankly, or said "definitely not." Again, the only evidence of the power of the graduate school for the economics students at Eastwood is in the English language proficiency requirement for TAs, as well as the dependence of the department on funding for graduate students TAs. This is one area in which decoupling does not seem to occur; the members of the department seem incredibly aware of the requirement. Unlike other situations of decoupling, the department does not seem to be trying to avoid or ignore the requirement. Interestingly, although the requirement comes directly from the graduate school, students seem to perceive that the requirement is from the department, as evidenced by the way the students get the message about the requirement, and feel stress around the requirement from the DGS and the connection with funding.

Peng is able to articulate the tension very clearly. He recognizes that the DGS and his advisor may have somewhat conflicting goals; his advisor wants him to do good work and is not concerned about how quickly he does it, while the DGS is more concerned about speed because of the connection with funding. In his own words:

The pressure has different roots. So my advisor focuses on my research. He requires high quality of the research but the department like the DGS, so he focuses on the speed of our research. He does not want us to wait until the fifth or sixth year. He hopes the students can work as hard as they can and he hopes the students can get the degree successfully and be successful in their job market...because the funding is from its from the graduate school I think most graduate students they work as TA's, the funding is from graduate schools so time is not a problem for my advisor yeah, but it is a problem for the DGS. He is in charge of the funding.

Peng's words reveal the inherent tension in the graduate school structure. The DGS is the one who must worry about funding and filling TA positions (e.g., university constraints), while other faculty members may be disconnected from such pressures and focus on other priorities like quality of research (e.g., field constraints).

#### *Westfield University*

As at Eastwood, the Westfield PhD program largely functions according to norms and taken for granted expectations, except with regard to the issues of TA duties and funding. At Westfield, there are no formal or regulative issues with funding, TA duties, or English language proficiency, so the department looks much like Eastwood would without the TA requirement rules, which speaks to the power of the discipline that supersedes university constraints. These differences mean that at Westfield, the department is almost entirely decoupled from the umbrella graduate school and university. Given such a decoupled situation, the Dean and DGS express very similar pressure to help students succeed, and the students express very similar pressures they put on themselves to do well.

The dean at Westfield discusses very similar sources of pressure as the dean at Eastwood. He wants to make sure students have funding, which was again the first issue he mentioned to me:

Well, right now is financial. It's huge. For instance, I just had an international student to see me yesterday that's in the sciences. And she was really concerned because her advisor had said he would give her three months to see if she could produce work and if not then he wouldn't be able to fund her anymore. So she was saying where do I turn for funding then? American students can go to NSF, can go to many different places. So, I was working with her and also with the department. But that's something that's repeating itself.

As we saw at Eastwood, sometimes international students may be even more vulnerable in the case of financial issues because of more limitations on funding sources. As we know, however, such issues are not affecting the economics department. The dean also wants to maintain the quality of the programs and the students. He discussed the pressure he feels from other peer universities:

There's always pressure in the sense that we compare notes with each other. We get together as graduate schools ... a lot of the time there is a certain amount of envy going on at what other schools are doing. But beyond envy we look on this as an opportunity to get good ideas that we can then develop within our own system. Sometimes they are tied to financial constraints, there are just things that we just can't do. But I wouldn't describe it as pressure as much as just a good collaborative effort, and knowing that there are colleagues that we can get good collaborative ideas from.

Mimetic isomorphism is an active motivating force at both schools as the inherent need to stay competitive is paramount.

Interestingly, the DGS in the economics department does not feel pressure related to funding, so his main concern is producing quality students who get good jobs. His main pressure is to keep the system running and keep the students moving

forward toward degree and job, though he expresses considerably less stress than the other administrators in this study, likely for the reasons already mentioned. The main issues he mentions are helping students stay on track (as in the system described earlier in which students have to show their connection to at least one faculty member), the pressure felt around the time that students go on the job market, and his observation that it is taking students longer to finish, which simply means that faculty may have more students to supervise at any given time:

It obviously generates more work because it means that if you have the same number of students per entering class, if they hang around longer, you end up working at every point in time with more students. This obviously adds some work. But it's not too bad. This part is not too bad.

For him having more students to supervise is not as burdensome as the job market preparation:

So you know in the fall there is a lot of pressure to prepare the students for both the interviews and the fly outs. And this is also the time when all those who plan to go on the job market panic, obviously. They have to finish at least, to have one well-written article so that they can present it, and usually they like to have more. So they come to your office time and again and they want you to read every draft, and you know we have mock interviews, we have seminars to prepare them for the job market. So there is a period in the fall, I would say part of October, and then November and December which is very intense, and intensive.

The DGS at Westfield is more preoccupied with the actual preparation of graduate students, and the day-to-day process of helping them succeed because he does not have to worry about other administrative issues, like the issue of funding that preoccupies the DGS at Eastwood.

The English language policy that does exist at Westfield is clearly decoupled from the economics department. Neither the DGS nor any of the students I

interviewed mentioned it. This could be because of the policy, because the department is not dependent on teaching assistants, or because English language proficiency is not that important in economics (as we will see in Chapter 6).

The students at both universities also express similar sentiments about putting pressure on themselves to succeed. Carlos actually points out that the pressure he feels from the department is really more like pressure he should put on himself:

The pressure that the department give you is more like a self-pressure like feeling responsible, work it, finish your work, don't lose your time. So it's like a little more self-pressure in that sense.

Students at Westfield seem to feel that being a graduate student is a great opportunity that should be fully exploited without a lot of outside pressure. Peter explains that it may be related to the advisor or the privilege of attending a program without major funding constraints for students, but that generally there is the expectation that students will do what is expected of them:

I don't know. My advisor, I mean I guess he just thinks that people should take care of their own obligations, and I don't know he doesn't go around bullying with an email or anything.

Along those same lines, students look to each other to keep pushing forward. Again, Carlos explains:

And the same thing like feeling the responsibility that they have a big opportunity here and making the most out of it, and also being around really, really smart people, trying to keep up.

Similarly, this connects to the discussion of the role of peers in Chapter 4. Because of some ambiguity in requirements and expectations, students look to each other to understand what quality might mean. Of course, students look to peers for many other

reasons, including support and guidance, but given the trouble that some students have with the clarity of expectations it makes sense that they would look to each other for guidance or see competition with peers as a source of pressure.

### *Summary*

In summary, with the exception of concerns about funding and the ITA policy at Eastwood, it is fairly clear that the inner workings of both economics departments are decoupled from the umbrella organizations: both the graduate school and the university as a whole. The similarity of the departments and of the individual pressure that students feel to follow the norms and figure out how to navigate the system speak to the power of the discipline to shape and constrain the decisions and organization of the department, graduate field, and its members. The fields are organized around the faculty job market system/routine in the academic discipline of economics, and much of the pressure comes from both the department faculty and student's goal to get "good placement." As Andres at Eastwood says: "What stress me the most is that I won't be able to get my dream job after I finish." Students learn to look to themselves and at each other in order to figure out how to be successful. They are not attuned to the larger issues of the graduate school; even mandates that come from the graduate school are seen as being department-specific, which again speaks to the power of the discipline in graduate study.

Figure 3 offers a visual representation of the situation. The discipline is the shaping force on both departments and students. At Eastwood there is an intervention from the university that comes through because of funding and therefore the ITA policy, but because Westfield is not dependent on funding through TAs, it is unclear what forces from the university shape the department at all. The empty arrow represents the decoupling evident at Westfield.



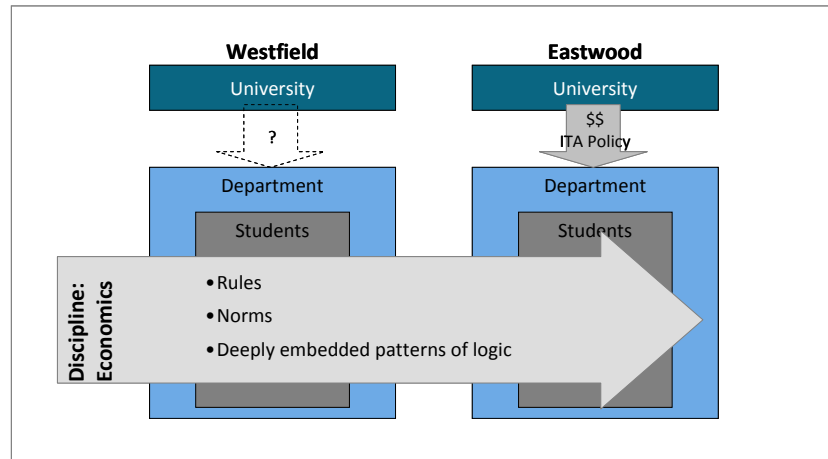


Figure 3: Influence of the Discipline

More about how language proficiency impacts these issues will be discussed in the next chapter, specifically in proposition 2, that non-native English speakers have trouble identifying and understanding the norms and rules of graduate school. The reader already has the hint that because of the nature of the system, non-native English speaker status is less important than one might expect. All students entering the programs at both schools have to figure out this unique system that is discipline specific and based on a very specific set of norms and rules around the job market and markers of success in economics. Before we move on to the next chapter, however, we must examine the final proposition, which is also intrinsically connected here. Analysis of graduate school as an uncertain institutional environment will provide even more insight into how graduate students figure out their roles, choices, opportunities and responsibilities.

Proposition 4: The graduate school student experience is an uncertain environment

While it has already been established in general terms that graduate school for economics PhD students is fairly uncertain, using the theoretical definition of institutional uncertainty (from Goodrick and Salancik, 1996) will add another

dimension to the consideration of the way students navigate a largely normative system. Is the system uncertain? In fact, this analysis shows that despite what might sometimes appear to be chaos, the system is not uncertain. According to Goodrick and Salancik (1996), institutional uncertainty exists when the means to institutional goals are unspecified, the knowledge base is not clear cut, and institutional values may themselves be uncertain. Because of the similarity of the institutional situation at both universities, as established by the prior propositions, I will consider both schools together in this section.

*The Means to Institutional Goals are Unspecified*

This condition of institutional uncertainty does not hold at either school. Despite the confusion and ambiguity that some students feel as they figure out the process, the means to the goals are not uncertain. As we heard earlier from Andres, the means are highly specified:

I mean the department is really transparent with the requirements in the processes to the degree so it says in the first year you have to take these courses and the second year you have to pick this other courses in the third year you have to do your exams and affirm your committee.

The goal, for both departments is to stay competitive, which is dependent on students having good job placement when they finish their degrees. In order to have good job placement, students must write a successful job market paper. As discussed in the job market/career goals section of chapter 4, PhD students in economics understand that the job market paper is of primary importance. Such a goal presumes that students want to pursue academic careers, which dictates the program organization. Other means may help them along the road to success in the job market, like strong English language skills, but those are peripheral to the necessity to have a good job market paper.

We have examined mechanisms that have arisen in the departments to foster students' successful transition to research, and help them on the road to writing a good paper. At Eastwood the third year paper and presentation, and at Westfield the workshop participation and required presentations in the third and fourth years exist to help students on the path to success paper writing and presenting. While it has been established that these are normative structures, it is clear that they are widely understood to be central to success. It is important here to make the distinction between the general means (knowing that it is necessary to write a good paper) and the specific means (how you actually write a good paper).

Students struggle with the technical aspect of the work, though they understand what needs to be done; doing research is challenging and trying to figure out a good question and write a good paper can be difficult. For example, as Raymond says, "You don't really face any pressure except the feeling of being lost because there is nobody is telling you what to do." He is talking about the technical requirements that exist underneath the larger expectation of writing a paper and the steps that students must take in order to do so (e.g. find an advisor). While students in both departments do find this challenging, as seen in the next chapter's discussion of the proposition about the difficulty of tuning in to the norms and rules, it is not because the general means are not specified, it is because writing a paper and doing good research is hard. In summary then, this condition for institutional uncertainty in both departments does not hold. The means for success, though meant to be understood though not formally written as regulations, are clearly specified in the minds of the students and faculty.

#### *The Knowledge Base is not Clear Cut*

The condition of institutional uncertainty regarding a fuzzy knowledge base is debatable. While the general knowledge base in economics is fairly clear, it is also clear that the material students need to learn is increasing and programs are having a

harder time fitting it all in. As we saw in Chapter 4, both DGSs discussed the growing knowledge base in the field. Recall the words of the DGS at Westfield:

The major issue is the amount of professional material is going very fast, but we still have only two years to teach. And we try to keep the work on the PhD dissertations within bounds. ...So this seems to be the major challenge. It's also the case, that in economics at least, the amount of work it takes to write a chapter seems to have grown substantially.

Concerns about the first year curriculum, as well as how much more work it is now to write a paper than it was in the past were discussed extensively in both departments. While the goal is still to write a good job market paper, the full disciplinary knowledge base needed to accomplish that goal may not be clear due to the immense volume of knowledge to be learned.

At the same time, however, despite the growing material economists are expected to learn, there is still consensus on what the most central (core) crucial material is, which explains why economics programs are all organized in the same way. Students must take microeconomics, macroeconomics and econometrics, and then within their chosen subfields the requirements become more muddled. While the full knowledge base may not be clear cut, it is clear that a core exists that cannot be considered uncertain.

#### *The Institutional Values are Uncertain*

Again, similar to the first condition, it seems that the values that guide graduate study in economics are pretty certain. The role of the job market paper makes the values even more clear cut than they would be already. The value is to stay competitive with peers and to produce good students who go on to do good research and find good placements in peer universities. While there may be challenges along the way, the overall value system is not up for debate. The system works in a very specific way and this is widely understood.

One element that may be a bit uncertain for non-native English speaking graduate students is the role of English language proficiency. This study begs the question about how English speaking departments and universities at U.S. universities view students who do not have native English speaking abilities. Much more about this issue will be explored in the next chapter; explicit consideration of the role of English will show that its position is uncertain. At Eastwood we see that English is important for students in terms of being able to hold TA duties, and perhaps in some cases when going on the job market, but overall a lack of consideration of English when it comes to economics research, and at Westfield, English is hardly mentioned at all in terms of students' potential for success.

### *Summary*

While the environment of PhD study at large research universities can seem uncertain due to the lack of formal rules and regulations, and students' obligations to figure out how to navigate the system on their own without explicit guidance, in institutional terms the departments are not uncertain. It is widely understood by all involved that they are set up to accomplish specific goals, and students are cultivated to learn how to pressure themselves, and figure things out, and move forward. One might speculate that such a system is in place because it prepares students for their roles as faculty in similar environments. While the knowledge base is expanding, it cannot be considered uncertain as a common core still exists that all students are expected to master; overall both the economics DGSs and the economics PhD students know that they have to work hard and move forward strategically. In doing so they are maintaining the academic system of economics and further defining the field.

### CONCLUSION

An institutional analysis of the economics PhD programs at both Eastwood and Westfield reveals a very specific culture of economics, and of economics graduate

study. The system largely functions based on widely established norms in economics, field-specific expectations, and pressure to stay competitive with peer institutions. Students must learn and make decisions guided by these norms in order to be successful, and for the most part, it seems that they do; regardless of native country, students are able to articulate what is needed to be successful in ways that match the DGSs' ideas and what have been articulated as the general expectations of the field. Despite the overt appearance of uncertainty or even a lack of structure, the system is revealed to be quite organized in its own highly institutionalized way.

Clear cases of regulation exist in both departments in the form of exams and peer reviewed papers, though the culture around the exams at Eastwood seems to be a bit higher stakes in the sense that students articulate their fear of not passing, while students at Westfield seem to understand that they will pass no matter what. The exams at both schools, and in economics as a field, exist to check students' knowledge, or at least to signal to the field that the students are "certified" in the core of economics. The other regulation, that students write papers and present their work, clearly has arisen out of the normative constraint of the job search, and the supremacy of the job market paper, which clearly drives both departments. It is this activity, above all else, that defines and assesses the work of the PhD program and the instructing and advising role of the faculty.

Regulations about English language proficiency, and responses to them, are clearly where the schools differ the most. Setting aside the issue, the programs seem to function solely based on the expectations of the field. Recall Figure 3:

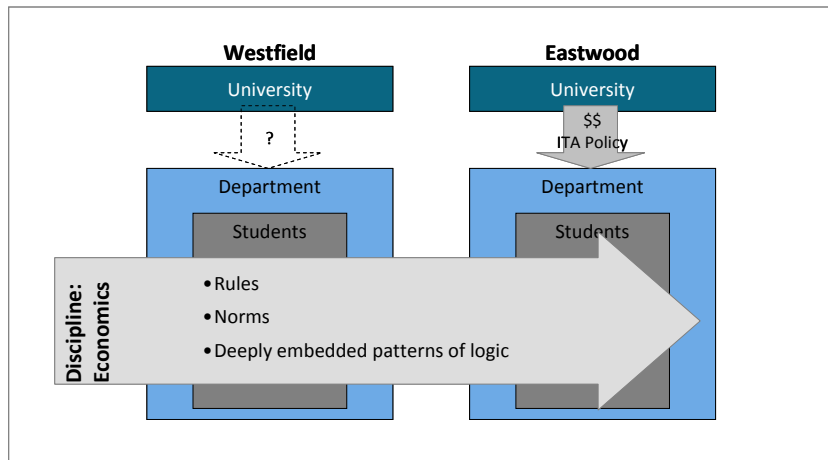


Figure 3: Influence of the Discipline

Separate from the funding or TA concerns, the DGSs at Eastwood and Westfield seem nearly identical. The program at Eastwood is much more tightly coupled to the graduate school in one respect simply because of the reliance on TAs and therefore their adherence to the policy for ITAs; the requirement has become institutionalized at Eastwood even though it does not come from the field. However, despite this tight coupling, it is perceived as a hurdle for funding rather than as a means to help students be successful, which in the end does indicate that the economics department views the requirement as separate from academic, field-specific work. Overall this chapter shows the supremacy of the discipline in determining the shape of graduate programs; it is interesting to note that the main item on the international graduate student path through school that does not come from the discipline is related to a basic need: funding.

Building on this understanding of the institutional environment in both PhD programs, how English language proficiency impacts students navigation of the system will be examined in detail in the next chapter. This chapter, however, offers a bit of foreshadowing. The path for all students is quite similar. They must manage

within the normative framework, with many unspoken and sometimes ambiguous rules, that exists to prepare them for an academic position at a peer university; non-native English speaking and domestic students articulate the system in much the same way. As I move forward to look explicitly at attitudes about English language proficiency, how they shape non-native English speaking graduate students' experiences, and how students navigate them, it will be important to consider how such attitudes fit into this institutional context.



## CHAPTER 6

### LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY

Now that I have looked at the way university, departmental and disciplinary characteristics and norms affect non-native English speaking graduate students' experiences at Eastwood and Westfield, as well as how they deal with such characteristics and norms and their institutional components, I will move on to look specifically at attitudes about English language proficiency. It is common sense that being a non-native speaker of a language can make life in that language challenging. Taking this challenge to the level of PhD study makes that challenge seem all the more daunting, given the rigor of academic demands, and the fact that students must complete their programs in a language that may be fairly new to them. Moreover, it has already been established that a substantial proportion of PhD students studying in U.S. graduate schools are not native English speakers, and departments like the ones under study here would not function without them. Despite this general understanding, non-native English speakers have not been the focus of much research on graduate education.

Why not? Perhaps it is assumed that they simply overcome their challenges, or that admission to PhD programs here requires native-like status. Another explanation could be that people do not know how to talk about language issues; Americans are notoriously monolingual, and the perception that learning a language is remedial, and talking about language as a handicap makes it an uncomfortable subject. Language ideology literature has already shed light on some of the inherent challenges non-native English speakers face in the U.S., in addition to some of the challenges Americans have in discussing language issues. It is time to look how such issues play

out for PhD students. Specifically, this chapter will answer these questions:

1. How do university, departmental and disciplinary attitudes about English language proficiency shape non-native English speaking graduate students' experiences?
2. How do students navigate and influence these attitudes?

In this chapter, the lens of language ideology is used to consider students' graduate student experiences as non-native English speakers. Four main propositions, derived from both the language ideology literature and my professional experiences, will be examined:

1. Non-native speaking graduate students encounter differential treatment in their experiences.
2. Even students who do not seem to struggle with English language proficiency may have trouble identifying and understanding the norms and rules that are part of successful socialization.
3. English language proficiency expectations are higher for students in more applied areas of economics.
4. Non-native English speaking graduate students currently bear the communicative burden in their graduate school experiences.

Within each proposition, the core set of identified and analyzed experiences from Chapter 4 will be reconsidered. These include: funding and TA duties; tension between research and teaching as well as PhD students' transition to research; general scholarly obligations, including learning to write and present for the field; finding and building a relationship with an advisor; the role of peers; and the job market and career goals. Analysis and consideration of relevant experiences for each proposition will help clarifying and identify the attitudes about English language proficiency in each department at each university.

## Coding

I developed codes for the four propositions based on language ideology. Table 12 shows the proposition, an example from the data, and the code. Please note that the reference to experiences in the propositions refers specifically to each of the aforementioned experiences.

Table 12: Language Ideology Coding

Proposition	Example from the data	Tenet of Language Ideology/Code
1. Non-native speaking graduate students encounter differential treatment in their experiences.	“Like when a student cannot speak fluently, he (a professor) totally ignores the student...that in the past he rejected some student because of this” (Karim, Eastwood)	Differential treatment
2. Even students who do not seem to struggle with English language proficiency may have trouble identifying and understanding the norms and rules that are part of successful socialization.	“If you’re proactive, you’ll do quite well. If you’re not, you know, that’s what it’s about.” (Richie, Westfield)	Unwritten rules
3. English language proficiency expectations are higher for students in the more applied areas of economics.	“If you’re good at math you may get away with not speaking English very well” (Pablo, Eastwood)	Role of English
4. Non-native English speaking graduate students currently bear the communicative burden in their graduate school experiences.	“The thing is our, our problem.” (Yunjeong, Eastwood)	Responsibility in communication

## Findings

### Proposition 1: Differential Treatment

The first proposition originates from the language ideology literature that considers language “the last back door to discrimination” (Lippi-Green 1997). Based

on both Lippi-Green and Pennycook's ideas about language-based discrimination, I examine how this plays out in the graduate school experiences of students in economics at the two universities. My specific questions include: Do non-native speaking graduate students encounter differential treatment in their experiences? Specifically, how does this possible differential treatment play out in each of the main themes under consideration here?

#### *Eastwood University*

The evidence for this proposition at Eastwood is mixed. When directly asked about differential treatment, many students indicated that they did not believe they had been treated differently as non-native speakers. Students commented on the many students and faculty from different nationalities and language backgrounds as an explanation for this. However, several types of differential treatment did emerge in the data and are related to TA duties, finding an advisor, and interacting with peers and professors.

As discussed in Chapter 4, many students at Eastwood cannot hold TA duties because they have not passed the language requirement. Naturally, then, it is not surprising that some of them may feel they are being treated differently. In general, however, students seem to understand the TA requirement. As Li says "I totally understand the position because our program, our department it has a really large undergraduate program, it needs a lot of TAs." The issue, however, is fairness in assigning TA duties, though only one student, Min, mentioned it: "Sometimes students complain about the way TA assignments are done. Non-native English speakers get the harder or more math-based courses." Her comment is interesting in that it connects to the idea that the non-native speakers are better at math. Because the department is concerned about funding students through TAs, however, it makes sense that they would try to put students in positions where they are most likely to be

successful.

Peng was the only student in the sample to share a story about being treated badly in a TA situation because of his English language proficiency. In this case the department did not put him in a position where he could be successful. As I shared in Chapter 4:

I remember that when I was monitoring the first exam for the course which I was a grader, students asked me, several students asked me questions about those problems on the exam because he wanted some clarifications but I just couldn't understand what they were talking about, because they spoke so quickly and because that was in an exam, they couldn't speak loudly, so I couldn't get what they want, so the students, they told that the other teaching assistant here, just to kick me out.

Peng is really being treated badly by an undergraduate; clearly asking that a TA be dismissed is not something that would normally occur in such a direct and open manner. This is the most overt case of differential treatment that I discovered in my research. It occurred because Peng was in a position where he could not understand the undergraduates. While the department may have considered proctoring an exam to be an easy task to perform, it did not result in a good situation for the undergraduate or the graduate student.

At Eastwood the issues with TA duties are complicated and clearly tense. As reported in Chapter 4, one of the American graduate students pointed out that there is the perception that some of the non-native speaking graduate students do not try to pass the assessment that allows them to be TAs because if they do not pass they often get assigned grading, which is perceived as an easier job. In Peng's case, even in his grading position he faced some challenges. As we have seen already, students in this department generally have to TA for at least two years, so it is reasonable to expect some concern over the way TA assignments are handled. The comments around TA

duties, however, do reveal a division in the department between American and Asian students that is clearly related to the Asian students' language ability, or at least their ability to hold TA duties.

Another area where differential treatment was evidenced was in professor relationships. Karim mentioned that he felt sometimes that the faculty paid more attention to native speaking students, which can make finding an advisor challenging:

For us it's really hard to communicate with professors because not all are really tolerant in terms of communication...they just give you one chance, if you screw that chance then at a later time when you need to talk with them in a way he may kindly ignore you.

While Karim sensed this challenge, other students, like Gang, offered a different explanation in which they took responsibility for the lack of a relationship with faculty. Gang commented on the distance between students and professors in this way:

I felt that maybe native speaking students are more close to our professors in our department. I think maybe the barrier of language for us makes us just stay away from the professors because maybe we are not very confident to speak to those professors ...So sometimes I met a professor in the department I think sometimes it was difficult for me to find the topic to start a conversation so I just said hi and left. But I realized for those American students they are very quick to find a topic to start a conversation.

The juxtaposition here is interesting. While many students did notice a certain distance between non-native English speaking students and professors, the characterization here is very different. Is it the students' burden or the professors'? A consideration of proposition 4, which focuses on who bears the communicative burden, will revisit this issue. When students feel they bear the communicative burden, they may withdraw from conversation opportunities. In this case, Karim does not seem to feel that he should bear the entire burden; perhaps the professor should make more of an effort to

understand him. Another important point here is the nature of communication with professors. Li did report that she noticed that professors spoke more slowly when they spoke to her, which she felt was because she spoke slowly. As she said, “it is the difference but I don’t think I’m treated unequally.”

Another issue related to differential treatment also arose at Eastwood. The use of the term “Asian” was frequent and complicated. Chinese and Korean students use the term to refer to themselves without reservation. At the same time, the department has a noticeable division between Asian students and American students, as discussed in the section on peers in chapter 4, and some students mentioned the stereotypes that exist with regard to Asians. For example, as Raymond told me about his advisor:

Actually, he spoke to me yesterday that he has found the lack of creativity among our international students especially Asians. Most international students are Asians anyway in the econ department.

Similarly, Yunjeong said “Our department doesn’t have that race discrimination because the majority of our department students are Asians.” The aforementioned comments from American students about how Asian students do not necessarily try to improve their English really speaks to some deeper underlying tension between the two groups that may be related to negative attitudes toward Asians. Pennycook (19988) and Lippi-Green (1997) talk in general about negative characterizations of Asian students; these characterizations definitely seem to be at work in the department at Eastwood. It goes both ways, however. In other words, the Asian students also have some negative attitudes about the Americans, and it is not clear where the animosity originates. As Yunjeoung says, “I didn’t want to go to places where only the white guys are.”

Moreover, it was clear from talking with both of the American students in the

department, as well as the two Spanish-speaking students, that there are some negative attitudes towards the Asian students that must affect the way they experience the environment. One main issue was related to TA duties, but the other issue was related to participation in departmental events and an overall spirit of collaboration. While the Asian students may not feel compelled to participate in department events, Keith offers an alternative explanation:

I have actually gotten really pessimistic about them. Like I sort of feel like they are just like a suck on resources and they contribute very little. They have very little interest in interacting with mostly other students, I mean in particular I feel like this is the case with mainland Chinese students, that they are really just here to get the degree and leave.

His comments here indicate some tension around the relationships between the students in the department. While the students may not perceive it as discrimination or differential treatment, it is clear that there is not necessarily a positive and harmonious interaction occurring between the different groups. Most students characterized this relationship as simply apathetic; not overtly hostile, but not necessarily that friendly either. As Jia says, “I think all of my classmates are really nice although I don’t know what to talk with them, every time we meet, we say hi.”

While this study focused on students’ academic experiences, some participants shared that they faced more difficulty outside of the university environment. For example, Yunjeong told me about a dentist in the community who discriminated against Korean students. She also shared a story about buying a car; she felt that she would have gotten a better deal if she were a native speaker. Several Chinese students mentioned that they had no trouble interacting in the department, but outside it was very difficult; people had little patience with their language ability. Students’ awareness of difficulties outside of the university environment, and their ability to



share them with me does signal that they are able to recognize and talk about differential treatment, which further supports my findings in the university environment. Students notice when they are being treated differently and are able to comment on it.

Thus, for the most part at Eastwood, students do not experience any overtly differential treatment, although there are clear issues with TA duties and interacting with professors and peers. The demographics of the students in the department, as well as what is perceived to be the generally individual work of an economics PhD student help explain these findings. At the same time, there is an undercurrent of tension related to the relationships with professors and peers that may have to do with both language and cultural differences, or as Jia puts it, simply not knowing what to talk about. More about these underlying tensions will be explored in the following propositions.

#### *Westfield University*

As at Eastwood, most of the students at Westfield did not report any overt cases of differential treatment. Unlike Eastwood, there were no overt issues with TA duties, though there were a few comments about professor and peer relationships. The discussion on this issue at Westfield had a very different tone than at Eastwood, which may be because of the more diverse demographics of the department. The only true similarity was the difficulty students reported in the external environment. All of these issues will be explored in this section.

The common response was that being a non-native English speaker was not an issue because of how international the department is. Interestingly, the students at Eastwood had not mentioned this difference in the same way. As Matteo said “honestly most of my professors or many, many of the professors are not American so it’s a very, very international block.” Matteo’s comment, as well as others who

mention the international nature of the field, indicates the concept of fit. The students at Westfield, particularly the non-native speakers, feel they fit in with the field.

Similarly, Angelo mentioned the large number of international faculty and the relative lack of importance of English language skills. He goes a step further to consider the English language ability of some of his professors: “The professors mostly are non-native speakers. And the most sad thing is that they still have incomprehensible accent, which make me think I should take a class; because, if you live in life and you're still are incomprehensible....it's not enough to live here.” While some students might perceive the professors’ skills as an indication that being a non-native speaker is not an issue, Angelo indicates that he would like to do better. His observation puts an interesting twist on the apprenticeship model of graduate school. Students learn by observing what others do. The DGS wants them to understand what examples are good and what models may not be so good. Angelo has decided that he would like to be better than some of his professors; other students may react differently.

Most students seemed to share the general feelings of Matteo and Angelo; they fit in well in their international department and did not sense much differential treatment. Pedro and Masa, on the other hand, did raise interesting issues in response to this question. Their comments fall into the general category of professor and peer relationships, and are distinct from the issues that arise at Eastwood. It is interesting to note that Pedro and Masa both struggled a bit more with oral communication than the other students I interviewed at Westfield. Pedro said that initially he felt that he had to prove himself because he was Mexican, and that his English language ability provided a further challenge. In his words:

Sometimes, you know, when I got here, I had this feeling... Perhaps, it was just me that because you're a Mexican or whatever, they are like, “Man, you

thoroughly do not have what it takes like to be here.” And, all were like, “You know, I went to Stanford. I went to Berkeley. I went to Yale. I went to Harvard, you know, my dad is a Mr. PhD, too. So, I felt like... There were some days that I felt, you know, I feel like my condition, the fact that I was not like a native speaker, my problem with expressing my ideas correctly were like not helping that much. But, I’m not sure. Perhaps, it was just like me, you know.

As was the case at Eastwood, the relationship between students’ confidence and perceptions is unclear. Pedro’s situation could be more about his own feelings of comfort in the environment, or he could have really been reacting to negative attitudes toward him. While other students did not explicitly link their non-native speaker status with their initial adjustment to graduate school, nor did they link their ethnic identity in quite the same way, some did mention feeling insecure and wondering how they measured up in comparison with their classmates. Such competition and the role of peers in graduate school was considered in detail in Chapter 4 and is clearly important here as well. As we saw, students look to each other as examples. While at Eastwood the relationship between students from different language and cultural backgrounds seems fairly segregated, especially between the Asian and the American students, at Westfield the demographics are a bit more diverse, which may explain why this issue about individual ethnic identity comes out there. Pedro was the only one to make comments like this, though, so no conclusive claims can be made.

In contrast, Masa reported sometimes feeling like he was being treated differently, but in a positive way. He said that because his classmates know that he has trouble communicating in English, they try to make sure to involve him and explain things to him. As he told me:

If I go to a party, for example, suppose that I can’t speak English very well. Okay, so, if I go to a party, I don’t speak, I speak sometimes. I can’t speak as other people are doing but if I could speak English and I didn’t talk, I think that the other guys think it’s very weird and maybe, I’m going to be out of the

ring. They understand that I cannot talk so they are ok with that and sometimes, people explain me what's going on so people care about me. In that sense, people treat me differently but it is not bad for me.

Masa noticed his classmates' kindness and efforts to involve him in social gatherings. In this case, rather than being treated negatively, being a non-native speaker actually caused Masa to receive what he perceived as positive treatment. His comment is similar to Li's at Eastwood, who noticed that professors and classmates spoke to her more slowly. Such treatment also might explain the common perception that people here are nice.

Finally, as at Eastwood, students did perceive that they had more trouble with misunderstanding and potential differential treatment outside of the academic environment. As Richie pointed out:

I think the bigger problem is, for example, when you come here and you called someone for customer support or whatever, people don't understand... And, it happened to me when I came ... people don't understand what you're saying on the phone and you feel embarrassed. You feel bad about it.

Like the students at Eastwood who had difficulty with dentists, or with buying a car, there is simply more difficulty dealing with the day to day tasks of living in a foreign country. Again, the fact that students are able to recognize this lends credibility to their general perception that within the academic environment they do not feel overt differential treatment.

In summary, at both Eastwood and Westfield, students generally seem to feel that they are not treated differently as non-native speakers. Despite this perception, there are clearly some underlying tensions present, between native and non-native speakers, between undergraduates and graduate students (at least in the case of Peng) and between faculty and graduate students that can be explained by English language

proficiency. At Eastwood, these tensions seem to exist mostly under the surface with few explicit examples of overt tension. The underlying tensions speak to some larger concerns about the experience both non-native English speaking and American graduate students, and the success of departmental collaboration. At Eastwood several issues came up with TA duties and professor relationships, and at Westfield one student (Pedro) did express some insecurity related to his ethnic identity and non-native speaker status. As a whole, students feel that people here are “nice,” and they note the international nature of the field of economics. More about these issues will be brought into the conclusions and implications for this analysis at the end of the chapter.

#### Proposition 2: Unwritten Rules

The second proposition, that even students who do not seem to struggle with English language proficiency may have trouble identifying and understanding the norms and rules that are part of successful socialization, originates from the language ideology literature that says there is more to success than speaking English well. A general attitude often expressed about international graduate students, that I hear often in my professional work, is “why don’t they just speak English?” The literature says there is more to success than just being able to speak the language. For example, in Warriner’s (2007) study, students who succeeded in mastering English still had difficulty finding jobs because of lack of awareness of cultural norms and rules. I wanted to look at whether graduate students faced the same challenges. In fact, this proposition is highly related to the system of informal rules uncovered in Chapter 5, so some connections will be made here. Students have to figure out how to be proactive, but it does not seem that being a non-native English speaker has a negative impact on this process.

### *Eastwood University*

As seen in the previous chapter, graduate school is based on strict but informal and not always explicitly stated rules, but the expectation that it might be more challenging for non-native English speakers does not seem to hold, at least at Eastwood. There is a general perception that graduate students struggle to figure out how to navigate their fields, but in economics it seems that non-native speaking students do not struggle more than other students. For some students, in fact, it seems that being a non-native speaking student helps them in the sense that they have a community of students who share their native language/culture and from whom they can learn norms and rules. Data here also connects with the role of peer relationships explored in Chapter 4.

Before getting in to the peer relationships, it is important to understand that for the most part, the graduate students at Eastwood reported that it is challenging to figure out how to navigate graduate school. Students must be resourceful, ask questions, and realize the value of persistence, regardless of their native language. Raymond vocalized this challenge particularly strongly: “the lack of policy, it’s the biggest obstacle in students’ path.” He also says “there is no clear guidance as to what you should to in order to graduate. So you have to figure all these out on your own which is, might be a good thing.” Students have the potential to get quite lost during their PhD program. While other students expressed these ideas less forcefully, all of them commented on the challenges of figuring things out on their own. As Pablo says:

The hardest thing for me it sounds like the uncertainty. You always have doubts of, is the research important? Or third year paper is good enough? Or what am I doing with myself right now?

Kevin, an American student, expresses a very similar sentiment: “I mean we have a

time line...but I mean I think one of the biggest problems that we have in our department is sort of the lack of structure... but I think it's often the case that there really is just nobody looking out for what we are doing.” As Paul, another American, says “academics are supposed to be independent people.” As shown in Chapter 5, the system promotes autonomy.

Other students express variations of very similar sentiments. Students like Andres view such independence as a positive factor. He complained about some of his classmates’ lack of initiative, who “expect to get the information out of nowhere.” You have to be proactive to be successful in graduate school.

One of the ways that some of the students are proactive is by using each other as a resource. They find out what they need to do from peers or senior students, and it seems that being from the same ethnic group or language background may help them in this regard. Gang talks about how much she learns from watching her senior students, and the implication is that those students are also Chinese. From watching her older colleague go on the job market to asking about courses and advisors, students use their networks to help them get through. Gang is starting her research now, and has had help from a senior Chinese student:

I just talk to one of my senior students in the third year because he started his topic last year at this time. So I think he has a lot of experience of starting in a certain period and he got masters degree before so he had more experience from the very beginning. I talked to him several times and he shared his interesting topics with me and he also recommends me some papers in plenty of topics. He asked me to make very clearly in each paper and know the full process and he suggested to me get some new ideas for these papers. I think this will be my starting period.

Other students express similar sentiments. Mario helped Carlos with his math, and it worked out well because they were both Spanish speakers. Peer relationships,

especially at Eastwood, seem to be based on language and country of origin; while the norm for success in economics is to be proactive, getting help from your peers is essential.

### *Westfield University*

Analysis of the data at Westfield reveals a very similar story. Students have to be proactive, and they have to figure things out on their own, and some foreign students with a tight-knit group from the same country may have an advantage. As Richie says, “If you’re proactive, you’ll do very well. If you’re not, you know, that’s what it’s about.” Peer relationships are essential, and students from the same cultural group tend to benefit from one another.

At Westwood, however, more students mentioned the challenges of figuring out expectations and how to be successful because of their English language proficiency and cultural background. For example, Angelo mentioned that sometimes he felt his listening skills inhibited his ability to understand expectations. As he said “sometimes not being able to listen... to help you understand what is important to spend more time on, and what if you need help from classmates or professors to understand what you don't -- but that's what I say is a difficult part.” Similarly, Pedro mentioned having to learn what the expectations are here as compared to in Mexico:

So, in Mexico, I knew what a good student was, so I knew exactly what were the things that made you a good student...But in here, when I arrived, I was like, I had no idea what they were expecting with me, like I studied a lot, I studied a lot but then, I was not studying the right things

Apart from Pedro and Angelo, the main concerns are similar to those at Eastwood. In the case of program requirements, there seemed to be an understanding of the value and purpose behind flexible program requirements. Richie points out that some students respond better to such flexibility than others:



There's much more flexibility with the academic requirements that has to be done and I think it creates less stress. For some people, it can create a lot more stress because they feel they don't have much order or structure in this last five years of, you know, being here.

When discussing the process of finding an advisor with students, many of them mentioned that they did not have an advisor or were not really sure which professor would end up being their official advisor as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, which seemed surprising as most of them were in the research stage of the program. Faculty responses to how many students they were advising were similarly vague. As Peter mentioned when talking about the process of finding an advisor, he said, "yeah, I can see how it is weird but there's never a formal moment where you supposed to have an advisor now or advisor assigned to you." He indicated that such components were just part of getting used to the way the program works.

It seems the program requirements become even more flexible when students enter the research phase of their work. Many students discussed the challenges associated with doing research. Richie's story is particularly telling of the challenges of doing research:

You don't get feedback for a while. You don't even know how it's going to go. There's so much uncertainty. You keep working. Keep sculpting, keep sculpting every day, in and out, in and out. You don't know... So, it can really be depressing. Sometimes, you realized things aren't working and you spent four months on it. It happened to me. So... you scrap it and start again. This can be depressing, right? If you're proactive, you'll do very well. If you're not, you know, that's what it's about. A proactive person will do very well here.

As came through in the Eastwood data, being proactive and ambiguity-tolerant is perceived as the key to graduate student success regardless of nationality, native language or other factors.

Moreover, the peer relationship is important and shows again that in this situation students from other countries may actually have more success in figuring out how things go. While this was more reported at Eastwood, Masa, at Westfield seems to learn most of what he needs to do to be successful from his senior Japanese students. As he says:

There were several Japanese students in the past here. ...each year, one Japanese student is admitted at Westfield so they are all theory students. They are all doing Game theory. They're all admitted by one professor and they are very successful in the job market. I talked with them frequently and about real research and the other stuff in like they've given this year. I think that was my way to adjust here.

In Masa's case, then, it is clear that being Japanese helps him learn the norms and rules of his particular discipline, in his particular research group.

Therefore, being a non-native speaker does not necessarily make navigating graduate school more challenging. In spite of several comments about adjusting to the ways things work in the US system, in general students at both universities reported the importance of being persistent and proactive, as well as how much they can learn from their peers and senior students in the same area. For some non-native English speakers, having peers and seniors from the same language or cultural background helps them even more. Everyone must learn to be proactive. As we saw in Chapters 4 and 5, autonomy is key.

#### Proposition 3: Role of English

This proposition, which was originally that English language proficiency expectations are higher for students in the social sciences as compared to the sciences, arose from my professional experiences working with students across different disciplines. I would often hear faculty from the sciences, math and engineering express the sentiment that graduate students in those fields do not need to speak

English as well as they might in other fields because of the technical nature of the subject. This proposition was designed to get at the ideas that students in more technical fields do not need to speak English as well as students in more verbal fields. Although I am not comparing a science and a social science, the range of subfields in economics, from very quantitative, theoretical and technical (eg. game theory, econometric theory), to more applied areas (labor and public) allows for an examination of this issue. Do economists in the less applied subfields have different communicative needs than others in more applied areas? What is the role of English for an economist in general?

Although there is no basis of comparison with another field here, the data supports the notion that in economics, there is the general perception of both faculty and students that technical skills are more important than English language ability. At the same time, there is a recognition that a basic skill level of English is necessary for economists. In this section I will tease out this contradiction, which is evident at both universities, as well as look at the role of the subfields in perceived importance of English.

#### *Eastwood University*

First, it is important to note that several students at Eastwood talked about the importance of English in general. It is an international language, and the primary language of economic work, so it would be absurd to deny that a basic level of English is essential to all economists. As Min said:

Even if you go back to China the top journals are written in English, it may be less important depending on your job. To be a teacher English is very important, to be a researcher, also important for getting feedback, going to meetings. English is the most important working language in the world.

Li makes a very similar point:

Even if I was still working in China the language, the English is becoming a critical part in our social life. It is the development of the globalization, more and more companies entered into the Chinese market. I think when you are just applying for a job it requires also have you, needs you to be good at English...since I'm now the PhD student in Econ I did feel a great demand to have a good performance in English speaking. Especially, for example if you want to write a paper you definitely be good at writing. Besides that, if you want to talk with your classmates or even in the future you are just discussing with your colleague or in the conference you will need to give some lecture. You'll definitely be required to be good at speaking English. Otherwise no one will get your point.

Both Li and Min acknowledge the general importance of English, both in the field of economics and in general. Despite these statements, the rest of the data at Eastwood will show a more nuanced picture of the relative importance of English for economics students, in particular.

The primary reason that English is perceived as important at Eastwood is because of the university's requirements for teaching assistants. As Peng points out, "Students don't get the message their English is important except for TA." Several of the students I interviewed had to take English classes in order to be allowed to TA; in that sense they got the message that English was important. My interview with the DGS made that very clear. The TA policy at Eastwood is the primary reason that anyone in the department talks about English language proficiency.

As we saw in Chapter 4, the DGS is very concerned about funding, and English and the ability to get funding are linked in his mind because of the language policy for ITAs. What is also clear from talking to the DGS is that he feels that spending time on English is separate from doing research and academic work:

I am sure it's a substantial difficulty for the student because they have to now (after not passing the ITA requirement) think more about the English proficiency and how they are going to survive in the program just because of the English and have to therefore divert their attention from the academic part

of the program, consisting of taking advanced courses in the program, getting ready to do research and so on and so forth.

He sees the English language requirement as a separate burden, unrelated to the research component of the program, which explains why students may see it in the same way.

Apart from making sure students are funded, which at Eastwood means being able to TA, the main priority for an economics graduate student is research and the job market paper. Teaching duties are seen as secondary to research skills, and for the most part it seems that English language proficiency is not essential to research. As Andres says, “obviously it’s important, but not really, really important.” Even the dean at Eastwood notes that language may be less important in some areas of study:

For example, a student, an international graduate student whose first language is not English may come to Eastwood with an exceptionally high level of skill in the particular research area that that student wants to pursue. Especially if that is not a primarily language based area of research, the student may be able to move forward and contribute at an extraordinarily high level as a student, even as a collaborator, even if that student’s own language skill set is modest.

Here the different subfields become important. The DGS at Eastwood talks about the relationship between subfield and language:

In some cases when you are doing very technical work like I mentioned in microeconomic theory, also if you are doing theoretical econometrics, which might be at one level like doing statistics, just statistics, pure statistics, then most of it is formulas up there right? You have to explain the nature of the problem and so on and so forth, but for people who are looking for that kind of expertise, I think they are looking beyond the language. They are looking for whether the person really knows the math and will be able to go far, not only in this project but other projects in the future. So it really depends on the subdiscipline in which you are specializing.

Many of the students in the sample are in the fields the DGS mentions:

microeconomic theory and econometrics. Like other graduate students they have to be able to TA, but they also seem aware of the relative importance of technical skills in their work. The data supports the notion that some students use their technical skills to their advantage, and to compensate for their non-native speaker status. For example, Jia said, “Because we have no advantage in the language, mathematics is our advantage. It is also one of the reasons for Chinese or other Asian students to choose this field.” Several students offered this justification for the number of non-native English speakers studying economics, and how they use mathematical skills to their advantage. Yunjeoung goes on at length about econometrics, although she is a microeconomic theory student:

I notice that many famous people in this field, I mean the percentage of Chinese, I mean the percentage of Asian people in econometrics is much higher than other people because I think econometrics is the field quite related to statistics and mathematics. Many Americans students don't want to chose such fields as their major because they don't think econometrics is very related to the major main stream of economics. They cannot tell stories, they cannot find interesting stories in econometrics because we just analyze data and use those mathematical or statistical tools. And even some American students find difficulty in mathematics that makes them to isolate from the field of econometrics.

Yunjeong's comment really encompasses a lot of ideas about economists and language. Americans like to tell interesting stories and they have the language ability to do so, and have weaker math skills, so they look for fields where their strengths will be valued; Asians rely on math and fill the gap the relatively lower number of American students leaves. Keith, an American student studying in a more applied area (environmental economics) seems to agree with Yunnjeong. As he says, “I feel a lot of how I, my particular skills in the field are presenting material and making arguments. My comparative advantage is not in doing some crazy technique that five

people in the world know how to do.” Keith’s strength is his ability to use language and make arguments. His reference to the crazy technique speaks to the more technical end of the spectrum. He goes on to say “in our field there are some people who really cannot speak and seem to do okay so it must be, they must be doing something right.” Again, it seems evident that the value of technical expertise may outweigh language skills in some subfields.

Karim, a microeconomic theory student, also explains his perspective on this issue. English is not as important in economics as it is in some of the other social sciences.

So for us English is not as important as it is for like psychology department or like political science and those kinds of things, that's right. We also deal with numbers, like there is calculations but it's not like that, even in Math's you know you have to have some communication skills. When you give a talk then you are not talking in English so you can't escape from speaking in English or writing in English but yeah, it's not like Psychology, those kind of, that means that you have to have, you also use some, you also use English as part of research. We use English in our research, like in the papers, there must be an introduction part there you explain what you did in English but you read the paper in English, that's one of the things.

Karim has the sense that you can learn enough English from the papers you read in order to be able to write them as well. Even Andres, who is in a more applied field, said “But because economics is not much about the language but about mathematics, I would say that it's not a main problem.” He goes even further to explain his perspective, which again shows the centrality of English to teaching:

(As a researcher) I would say then I would be able to write down the models to get the integrations, to get all the techniques and you just hire an editor or somebody that helps you with the language you want to publish in English, but if you still want to get an academic job it's important in terms of teaching and if you want to get a research job it's always important in terms of the way you to present your papers.

There is the acknowledgement by both Karim and Andres that presenting papers requires some English skills, as well as the sense that there is a basic language skill level needed, but it is not as important as technical expertise. Peng, another microeconomic theorist, went so far as to quantify this idea “So if your success can be divide into 100% , I think English is only maybe at most 10% at the reasons that can lead to your success and the 90% is the work you have done.”

Peng also points out that because of the international nature of the audience, presenting work is less stressful and does not demand a high level of English skill:

I don't think presentation would be a problem if I can understand what I have done very well, because I have found that in most of the seminars almost half of the participants are international students or professors, so I don't think English would be a problem when I represent my result or my paper. But of course if I can speak English well that can help me...

Despite all of these perspectives, however, it does seem that sometimes English language proficiency is more important than often perceived. Pablo, also a microeconomic theorist, talks about how difficulty with English can affect the way people respond to your ideas:

I think in general if you're not very strong at English maybe people would not, I don't want to say if people don't take your idea seriously but because I don't think that's true, but it's definitely a hindrance if you don't speak very good English. Maybe your idea gets lost in maybe your accent or maybe just somebody struggling with how to explain it in English, so maybe just the fact that it's not as clear as maybe it could be. It's just kind of diminishes the quality of your presentation and that could hurt your performance.

There is the sense that English affects the way you are perceived, which may affect chances for success. For example, Gang told me the story of a top candidate



who did not get the best job placement because of his English:

There was a candidate in my department this year who did research very well but he has some language problem so the final placement was, is not as good as he think. Because I heard first they are considering about his research, he can be placed to the top, in the top ten universities but finally he just got a job [at a lower ranked school]. Of course that was also a very good university but it just cannot match his research, because of his language.

The student and his peers assumed that the disappointing result of his job search was because of language, as everything else in his portfolio was very strong. While the department may not be sending a strong message about English, students learn from each other and from watching senior students go on the job market what the real priorities may be.

Raymond, a Taiwanese student who wants to go into finance or business, made the same case:

Most people were from Asia, math geeks, so their techniques are superb and the normal American students cannot match with them on techniques. But they can get better placement because of creativity and maybe because of their presentation skill, how they present themselves as scholars and how they present their work.

He went on to say, “there is a typical trait that sometimes the topic of a paper that is written by international students it can be very interesting and thought provoking but sitting through their presentation is like a chore, it’s tedious...some people falling asleep.”

In talking about career placement, however, Paul’s story contradicts Gang and Raymond. As he said:

I mean it definitely helps it (English) is important but it is not the most important thing. I mean you can be a great economist without having great English language skills, probably our top candidate in the market this year his

English wasn't so great but I mean he is smart and he is able to write good research and that is what is important.

Peter goes even further to say that the subfields are not that important. Perhaps English is more important in the more applied fields, "but I think in all of economics you can get away with just strong math and just data work or theory work."

On the other hand, Jia, an econometrics student, talks about a case in writing where English did prove to be more important than he expected:

Actually I submitted my Master's thesis paper to a journal and I was rejected. The editor is very much like this paper, and he gave me some comments saying that this paper has a very interesting topic and the perspective or the view is narrow. There is problem in that, the referee gave me a tip off saying that 'I couldn't follow the paper, I couldn't understand what he is doing, I didn't see the contribution. I think you did some contribution but it is just that I didn't catch where your contribution is.'

This story contradicts what we have seen before about the relative ease of writing a mathematically based paper using formulas. It shows that even in a very technical field, language may still be important. At least a basic level is needed; a student must be able to make his mathematical argument clear.

The evidence is mixed here. There is the general perception that English is important, though perhaps not as important as in other social sciences. There is also much to say about the role of subfields. Students in more theoretical and technical subfields simply do not need to use language in the same way as students in other areas of economics. The international nature of the field, as well as the relatively small number of American students who study in the highly technical areas may reduce the communicative demands of the field overall.

*Westfield University*

As at Eastwood, several themes with regard to the role of English in economics

are present here. Again, some students feel that English is important, the general perception is that English is more important if teaching is one of your priorities, and how important English is depends on your field as well as your career goals. The DGS at Westfield really does think that English is important:

You know math is just like another language that we use. If you take political science, there is a group who use formal analysis. They write better than economists on average. Again, there is variation. But on average, they write better, they speak better. I just don't know what's driving this self selection. But nevertheless even if you are in economics you have to teach, you have to go to conferences and present your work. You have to give speeches occasionally. You should be able to make it in an eloquent way.

In this statement the DGS acknowledges the importance of English for economists, but also points out economists may not be as strong as political scientists, for example. Peter makes the same statement about the social sciences: "English proficiency is definitely important, but it's the say, in among the social sciences it's probably the field where it is the least important."

Again, the more technical nature of economics is important here. Angelo was one student who really argued for the importance of strong English skills. When he expressed his disappointment in the skills of some faculty members, he revealed that he believes that English is really important:

I would say that it seems like English is really important; because it's really important in general for economists, for researchers to be able to present their work in a clear way. And it is even more so for students. Because as an economist usually you have to talk only to people in your field; as a student you have to convince also professors who are not in your field.

In this final sentence Angelo is referring to the often interdisciplinary nature of economic work. Depending on a student's area of specialization, they may need to communicate clearly with faculty and others in slightly different areas. Angelo and

Peter are both in more applied subfields of economics (Labor and International Macroeconomics) but have very different opinions about the importance of English language proficiency.

Career goals also make a difference in terms of how important English is.

Angelo seems aware of the possibility of working in an area outside of academia:

If I want to go to public sector or private sector, I will have to be able to speak English much better than I do. So, I am also taking into consideration that -- when I say that I would like to improve my English; if I had just to stay in academia maybe I would be less concerned.

The language expectations in academia, for students who want to go to work in an economics department, are lower than for students who want to go into other areas. Peter also mentioned the different priorities depending on what you want to do. He said that professors who plan to teach in a business school need to pay more attention to both their communication skills and their teaching skills. He points out, however, on the academic job market, “A lot of the people assessing you in deciding whether to hire you are non-English speakers themselves too. I don’t think it’s that big of an issue.” Again, the international nature of the field arises.

He articulates the role of subfields similarly to the students at Eastwood: “I think if you're in one of the really mathematical fields, it doesn’t matter at all. So you would see my Japanese classmate, I never heard him uttering a full sentence of more than four words but he basically does math, so it doesn’t really matter.” The Japanese student mentioned here, Masa, seems to agree with his classmates. In his interview he told me that English is his biggest problem and that he has trouble communicating with people in his department. Despite his experience with the challenges he faces in communicating, he seems to be relatively unconcerned about how his abilities will affect his future. In his words:

Ok. I think that to be successful, very fluent English is not very necessary because the only thing required eventually is to write papers. And also most joint research is conducted by emails. Even if I'm very bad at English, I can communicate with them with writing formula or something, I think, it is especially in this theory field.

Because Masa is an economist specializing in game theory and highly theoretical and mathematical concepts, he seems to get by with relatively weak English language skills. Matteo, a finance student, expresses a very similar idea. As he says, "you can communicate very clearly even if you aren't very good" because of the mathematical nature of the field.

Similarly, when I spoke with Ron Bin, who is in game theory, the same specialty area as Masa, about how important English is for game theory students, he said it was not important at all. Because he has spent much more time in the US than Masa, his language skills are much stronger, but he believes that they will not help him at all on the job market. "It's all about your research and your job market paper," he says.

Finally, there seems to be some agreement for students who want to pursue academic careers in economics that it is important to be able to sell your ideas, though it is not clear exactly how good your language needs to be to do so. Pedro explains in a little more detail his perspective on what it takes to be successful as an academic in his field:

At the end of the day, so the main element that constitutes your life as an academic economist is your papers, right? So, of course the papers need to have two main ingredients. So, you're going to need to have like a good idea but also a very nice presentation of idea. I think that the main difference of economics with some other social sciences is that for example, if I were to write, let's say on political philosophy or say on liberty or justice or equality... I would need to have a very good use of language, I think. But, in economics, given that the main body of economic theories brace in terms of math, you can

kind of side the problem with language and like the main papers in the main journals are like...three pages in introduction and then after that, the model. I met like lots of guys that have like an excellent publication record, that they can barely speak in right pronunciations, right? They have like even worse accent than I have. So, I don't think that's like super important. It is important if you need to write ideas and at least, your first... I mean, at least, your first three pages. The pages that you're going to write, it needs to be very good prose.

Therefore, being able to sell your ideas is important, but it is questionable how strong your English skills need to be in order to do that. If your papers are the most important component of your professional work, and you can get help editing them, and the majority of the paper is based on a mathematical model, English seems to be of secondary importance.

Finally, Richie suggests that confidence is more important than English language ability. "Well, at the end of the day, most of economics is about selling your ideas, right? So, maybe, it's easier to talk about the ideas if you feel comfortable about it. I'm not sure if it's more about proficiency as it is about feeling comfortable." His thoughts connect back to the question of how much students' perceptions are influenced by their actual English proficiency level or by the amount of confidence they have to express themselves.

Consideration of this proposition at both Eastwood and Westfield leads to the general conclusion that English language expectations in economics are lower than in other social sciences. There is a minimum threshold to pass; students must be able to make their arguments. At the same time it is clear that teaching is the main activity where English is essential. Because teaching at Eastwood is more common, it came up more often there. There are mixed ideas about how successful students can be depending on their English language ability. In part it depends on their career goals, but even for students who go on the academic job market there does not seem to be a

standard conclusion for how important their English might be. Strong technical abilities or expertise in a specific area of economics may compensate for other factors.

#### Proposition 4: Responsibility in Communication

The final language ideology proposition, that non-native English speaking graduate students currently bear the communicative burden in their graduate school experiences, originated from work about who bears the responsibility in communication. While Lippi-Green (1997) found that generally non-native speakers need to make themselves understood, as opposed to expecting their others to try to understand them, others (Beykont and Daute, 2002; Pennycook, 1998) argue that communication should go two ways. While there is the feeling that there should be a shared responsibility in communication, is there? This proposition was designed to get at whether students felt that they have to shoulder the communicative burden in their graduate school experiences.

#### *Eastwood University*

Non-native speaking graduate students overwhelmingly said that they should bear the communicative burden in interactions with native speakers. Gang's words summarized the general idea on this topic, "I think it is our responsibility because we moved here and we have to adapt to the culture here. I know it is very hard, maybe it will take more years for us to get involved." Another Chinese student did point out that others could help: "it's our duty to improve our English, but they can help."

This result seems to contradict the evidence for the prior proposition: students do not feel any great pressure to improve their language skills (unless they are trying to qualify to hold TA duties at Eastwood), but at the same time they believe they are primarily responsible for communicating effectively with native English speakers. This could help explain why some students reported avoiding situations where they would be expected to make small talk or initiate conversations in English. As Peng

pointed out:

I think in the social activity in most of the cases I cannot get so involved in the talking, so I think when we talk about economics we have a lot to talk but when we talk about the additional time, the football game...in most of cases we do not have much in common with other students.

His words indicate the deeper cultural divide that can exist between international students and American students and faculty. Because he feels the burden, and he does not know what to talk about, he chooses not to participate.

Along the same lines, I found that students do suffer anxiety and confidence issues related to their English language ability that influence the way they interact with others. It is unclear whether such issues are a result of the way they are treated or their own insecurities and conceptions of their ability to function in graduate school in English. As Yunjeong stated: "I was scared, because sometimes I was very embarrassed. Whenever I speak some English but they didn't understand so it made me really embarrassed and really depressed. I didn't want to go to places where only the white guys are." Li and Min expressed similar fears. As Min said, "When I talk about economics, I'm okay. Otherwise, I get scared." Other Chinese students shared similar sentiments: not attending department events, not speaking up at conferences and other repercussions of feeling insecure as non-native English speakers. Such an explanation connects back the discussion about peers and the polarization that is going on in that cohort of graduate students. American students may resent the lack of participation of the international students, not understanding that there may be another reason that students choose to withdraw. Students feel the burden to communicate, and if they cannot do so successfully, it can be quite difficult for them.

#### *Westfield University*

At Westfield, students also felt that it was their responsibility to communicate



with others, and to make sure that others understood. Richie offered a bit more perspective on the issue, which connects well to what students said at Eastwood. Basically, students know they have the responsibility to communicate with others. They can either respond by being proactive, or withdraw and seek out people from the same country or language background. As Richie says:

You start to get in to the shell where you try to look for people who are like you and in fact are from your country. But, on the other hand, if you start thinking it's the other guy's responsibility to understand, you can have a very different experience. So, I think it's more an issue of how comfortable you are and what decision you make about who you're going to interact with... You automatically have alienation, self-imposed alienation which I think is a track for a lot of people, especially the graduate students...

Similar to Eastwood, non-native speaking students at Westfield do seem to withdraw and tend to be less involved in social interactions. As Ron Bin said, "the people who have the biggest language barriers hang out less with, with the other students and more with students from their own countries." Masa, in particular, mentioned that he did not feel comfortable interacting with others. His story about his classmates trying to involve him in the conversation (as mentioned in the analysis of proposition 1) actually contradicts this proposition. Masa feels it is his responsibility to communicate with others, but as that story showed, his classmates may try to help him participate. This difference might be explained by the different department demographics at Westfield, in that there are more Europeans students and fewer Chinese and Korean students.

In summary, while the brevity of this section may indicate that support for this proposition is weak, it is simply because the answer is simple and without debate. Students feel they bear the communicative burden. Such sentiment impacts how much non-native speakers interact with others outside their language and cultural group.

When students struggle to make themselves understood, and feel that it is entirely their burden to do so, they may withdraw, which also helps explain some of the tensions that were revealed in the analysis of proposition 1. While clearly they may withdraw for other reasons, more effort needs to be made to help forge connections between students from different language backgrounds and educate speakers about multicultural communication.

#### Conclusions: General Themes across Both Departments

The findings for each of the propositions as well as the other themes that emerged speak to the theory and some larger themes that can be drawn from the data to answer the initial research questions. I want to emphasize a few main points: the messages students get about the importance of English, navigating graduate school, the importance of language ideology, and the role of English in economics. Finally, I share the limitations of these analyses.

#### Messages about English

*The important point here is that students get very few direct messages about the importance of English.* At Eastwood the direct messages are related to the ability to hold TA duties. Unfortunately, there seems to be little connection made between the understanding that students must pass the TA requirement and the idea that perhaps such skills would also help them in their future work as economists. At Westfield students overwhelmingly reported not getting a message about English. No formal messages come from the department about it. Students figure out on their own, from their peers, and from the faculty they see, what they think the standards should be, or simply for themselves. None of the students at either school were ever spoken to directly about their English by a faculty member, except in the case of being able to hold TA duties at Eastwood.

As the apprenticeship model in graduate school (Bieber & Worley, 2006)

predicts, students may get individual messages from their advisors, but at least within this sample no such messages were reported. As Jia said, “I don’t think professors can do that, because it is really difficult for them to care about your English.” Students decide for themselves, from conversations largely with their peers and with senior students, how to manage these messages (or lack of messages). As we learned from the literature review on graduate student socialization, *successful students decide for themselves how to get through their programs*. As we saw here, students learn by example, and decide for themselves how important any particular skills may be. Particularly, as we saw in Chapter 5, most messages students receive come from the discipline, and there no strong disciplinary messages about English language skills.

### Navigating Graduate School

In terms of the difficulty figuring out how to be successful as a graduate student, *it is clear in both of these departments that graduate students need to be self-motivated and resourceful as they navigate graduate school*. While the ambiguous nature of graduate school has been discussed in the literature (Gardner, 2007; Lovitts, 2008; Nettles & Millett, 2006) it is interesting to see how such issues are articulated by non-native English speaking students. The absence of clear guidelines seems to affect all graduate students similarly; non-native English speakers are not at a particular disadvantage on this point, although students like Pedro and Angelo at Westfield did indicate that they had a hard time figuring out expectations at the beginning. At these universities at least, the most successful students, regardless of individual differences like native language, are those who function well with minimal oversight or guidance.

### Importance of Language Ideology

At the same time, my data shows that *language ideology is a useful lens for consideration of the experiences of non-native English speaking students*.

Examination of the struggles that non-native English speakers perceive deepens understanding of graduate student experiences. Although graduate school is a highly international environment, as is academia in general, challenges clearly exist in communication and collaboration between groups. Some students sense differential treatment, while others accept that they have come to another country to study and must learn to deal with a foreign situation. Such students accept that they may have a different experience in the U.S., which according to the ideology of monolingualism, is the price they have to pay (Tse, 2001). Negative attitudes between groups exist on both sides of the story, further complicating the situation. As with the case of Yunjeong, who was afraid to talk to the “white guys,” it is clear that the issue is not simple. While she may feel they do not want to talk to her, at the same time it is clear that she holds some bias against them. The power differentials evident in the language ideology literature are present in both departments. The question is, what can be done about them?

These power differentials may have implications for individual students in the department, as well as for the department as a whole. Students at Eastwood could potentially graduate with their PhDs and leave with negative attitudes about those in their field from other countries, or at least with poor understanding of other groups. They may also leave with negative attitudes about their graduate program because of such tensions. Such tension clearly affects the potential for scholarly collaboration, which has a negative impact on the department as well. *More investigation into the repercussions of tensions and negative attitudes of graduate students from different language and cultural groups is needed.*

#### The Role of English in Economics

*Similarly, consideration of the role of English in economics is complicated.* My data support the stereotypes: to an extent math skills are generally perceived as

more important than language skills for an economics scholar and non-native speakers can use their relative advantage in math to compensate for their English skills. At the same time, the importance of English is stressed for those students who are TAs, and for those who want to get a top job placement. Despite this awareness, it seems that at least most of the students in the sample are content to work on their own with the knowledge that they can get by.

Both the obstacles to interacting and confidence issues seem to counteract the idea that they should be more proactive in building communication skills. Furthermore, students seem to have an awareness that perhaps they should improve their English, but there is no mechanism in place to make sure that they do. Even English requirements for TA duties at Eastwood do not seem to push students much; those who were not able to TA held grading duties or found another alternative, and still reported that spending time on English language improvement was not a priority. In keeping with the previously described emphasis on student autonomy, the departments are not in a position to push students to develop their skills or confidence, although perhaps more formal sharing of stories of students who were particularly successful or unsuccessful on the job market could help. Overall, communication in the departments about these issues is not formalized. As detailed in the institutional analysis, regulation and formal inspection is not the norm in graduate school, and the loose culture that exists contributes to the lack of consistency of messages that exist about English language proficiency. Such is the nature of graduate school; information is passed around informally among students and occasionally from faculty. *Such a finding, however, makes it difficult to criticize students with a lower level of English language proficiency; apart from TA duties, which are generally seen as a means for funding, there are no direct messages about the value of English, and students therefore are left to decide for themselves how valuable it is.*

## Limitations

One of the limitations here is the distinction between language skills and confidence in speaking. It is not clear from this data whether the students' experiences were a result of their actual language skills, their own confidence level when speaking English, or the way that others perceived them. I did not design the study based on students' language backgrounds or level of English language proficiency. In this sample, students were all able to communicate with me, though some more clearly than others, and as has been seen, because of demographic differences and perhaps for other reasons, students from Westfield reported fewer challenges as a result of their non-native speaker status. As the language ideology literature points out, regardless of English language ability, simply being a non-native speaker is a factor in communication. However, Lippi-Green's (1997) study of accent does indicate that some accents might be perceived differently from others, and students' language level clearly affects perception of accent. Future work may want to account for language level in the design, though it would be difficult to do that in a discipline-based study.

Future work may also focus on students from specific language backgrounds or cultural groups. My goal here was to get a representation of the different groups in the two departments, and graduate school is best looked at through a discipline specific lens, but I could imagine a study of Chinese economics students at a number of universities, for example. Such a design would promote more of a focus on language-specific issues, which while not the goal here, clearly emerged as a major area of interest. It would also be interesting to see how these issues play out for departments or students in other disciplines.

Finally, the caliber of university may also be a factor here. Over the course of this research, I have discovered that students in programs that are not as highly ranked as Eastwood and Westfield may need to have stronger skills, and may receive different

messages about how to be successful. Students from top programs tend to have an advantage over others on the job market; a student from a middle-tier university may need better English language skills in order to compete.

### Big Picture Issues

Outsiders to academia may be surprised to see what little value is placed on English language skills. Students can graduate with PhDs from top schools like Eastwood and Westfield with a low level of English. It is clear from the study that students are not to blame for their language abilities. They are admitted to these universities, they attend them, and they figure out how to be successful in their programs, where they may receive few direct messages about the importance of English. Students from other countries generally have a strong support network comprised of others from the same country and language of origin. The monolingualism ideal, or “why don’t they just speak English?” (Tse, 2001) does not hold. One could argue from this data that some students need their native language and peers from their own cultural groups to be successful in graduate school.

Again, the discussion comes back to teaching, its relatively low status (when compared with research) for academics, and the university system. Both graduate students and faculty are usually required to teach. What is also revealed in the study is that *teaching is the only regulated form of communication for graduate students, but its status as a lesser priority is broadly accepted*. Moreover, there are no regulative language expectations for professors. Therefore, once students pass through their careers as graduate students, they no longer get *any* direct messages about English. The system continues in this way, with little change. These conclusions set the stage for the final conclusions presented in the next chapter. I will explore the value of bringing institutional theory and language ideology together, and talk about the implications for both theory and practice in our internationalizing university system.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSIONS

International students are usually relegated to narrow discussions of English as a Second Language learning, immigration issues or cultural events on campus, and are often viewed as the purview of a very limited group of scholars. This is unfortunate given their prevalence in many different fields in universities across the United States. Recent news articles in higher education emphasize their high numbers even further; the percentage of international students studying in the U.S. is growing, especially at schools with an already large international population, and the undergraduate international population, especially from China, is also growing (Redden, 2010; Jasnik, 2010, Lederman, 2010). As William Brustein, vice provost for global strategies and international affairs at Ohio State University says in Redden's (2010) report, "If you look at our international student numbers, we're coming close to the day when we're going to be closing in on 50 percent undergrad, 50 percent graduate/professional." What do such numbers mean for the system, especially given the findings of my study? From my perspective, the university system is unprepared for such growth, and the different issues that the changing demographics of the student population will bring. Higher education administrators, faculty and scholars must think seriously about how to maximize the success of such an international learning environment on U.S. campuses.

The interdisciplinary approach (i.e., drawing on institutionalism and language ideology) of this study shows the lines usually drawn around international students are artificial, and enables a deeper understanding of the complexities of the issues facing non-native speaking graduate students that impact the entire university system. In this



chapter, I will review the main points revealed in the study, discuss the benefits of bringing the theoretical lenses of institutional theory and language ideology together, and postulate on implications and future considerations for the university system.

To review, the study uncovered a set of experiences on which further analysis of PhD students can be based. From my interviews and analysis of two economics departments at two universities, the main academic experiences of PhD students can be classified into these categories: funding and TA duties; tension between research and teaching as well as PhD students' transition to research; general scholarly obligations, including learning to write and present for the field; finding and building a relationship with an advisor; the role of peers; and the job market and career goals. Being able to understand graduate student life through these specific milestones will be beneficial for those doing future research on graduate students, and could potentially inform a larger survey of graduate student academic experiences to continue this research.

Using the lens of institutional theory to analyze PhD student experiences revealed how taken-for-granted the steps to graduate student success in economics can be. Apart from strong regulations at Eastwood tied to the ITA policy and funding, and symbolic regulations around the qualifying exams at both schools after the first year of study, much of what students need to do to be successful is learned informally, though clearly learned. While it was shown that the environment of graduate school is not uncertain, it is clear that much of the system is based on strict, but informal rules. The contradiction here is interesting. Graduate school may seem very chaotic to a casual observer, but in fact there is a specific rhyme and reason to the chaos. As Peter at Westfield pointed out, "I mean it's so very informal but it ends out working out." Both PhD programs respond to disciplinary expectations, and tend to be relatively decoupled from the home university, except in the case of the ITA policy at Eastwood.

Such a system works to prepare students for the autonomy they will have as future faculty members.

Language ideology, on the other hand, enabled a consideration of attitudes toward non-native speakers of English in graduate school, given the understanding of the complexity of the institutional environment. To my knowledge, attitudes about non-native speakers in graduate school had not previously been examined in such an integrated context. Student voices, seen through the lens of the language ideology, offer perspectives that may not have been considered before. Differential treatment, tensions between groups, and what happens naturally in a relatively unregulated diverse environment show that the system could definitely work better than it does currently. The other main point of interest this lens sheds light on, that will continue to be debated as the number of international students continues to increase at US universities, is the role of English in graduate student work, especially in mathematical fields where English is not integral to the subject matter. This study shows no consensus: English is clearly of secondary importance to technical expertise, though there is a general acknowledgement that some minimal base level of language is needed. Clearly, stronger English skills would not hurt a graduate student, but devoting time to English at the expense of research or academic work is not necessarily favored.

Using institutional theory and language ideology to examine economics graduate student experiences shows how taken for granted much of graduate student life is. Students, regardless of their native language, and at least in the field of economics, are expected to learn the norms, rules and deeply embedded expectations of graduate school regardless of their nationality or native language. At the same time, they receive few direct messages about the importance of English language or communication skills along the way. In such a way, English language skill

development is really part of the professional socialization of graduate students; it is taken for granted and not discussed explicitly, in much the same way as other norms and rules of graduate school.

### Theoretical Implications

This study showed that institutional theory is a useful way to consider and understand the various sets of constraints in graduate schools, and the relationships between PhD programs and the institutions that house them. The tenets of institutional theory are alive and well in this context, at it had previously not been used to consider such an environment. As universities move forward to ask difficult questions about the future of graduate school and the structure of the university system, it will be important to keep in the mind the regulative, normative and cultural cognitive elements on which PhD programs operate. It is clear from this study that structure or administrative change that comes from above, and is not explicitly tied in to disciplinary expectations or funding considerations, will face difficulty being integrated. As universities continue to internationalize and interface with multiple cultures and norms, attention will need to be paid to the structural limitations and disciplinary values revealed in the study.

Language ideology is a useful way to consider the experiences of non-native speakers of English, and should continue to be used to examine universities and graduate schools. It allows for an important consideration of the distinction between language level and perceptions of language level and ability. While previously used to look at different educational contexts, in which it is easier to debate the supremacy of the English language, language ideology allowed a more nuanced approach to considerations of English language in higher education. As the debate continues over English language admissions requirements, language and communication programming requirements for admitted students, and other language-related factors

universities will continue to grapple with given their increasingly international demographics, attention should be paid to integrating the community, and the social components of native language status. As previously postulated (Lippi-Green, 1997; Beykont & Daiute, 2002), successful communication should not be solely the burden of the non-native speaker. If the university system wants to work to maximize the benefit of language diversity on campus, the issue needs to be more broadly considered, and programming should be targeted for all students and faculty.

### Teaching

As graduate schools and universities as a whole think about teaching, research and communication in general, it becomes clear that the only required or regulated communication for graduate students that must occur happens while teaching. As shown at Westfield, however, depending on the university policy, even that may not be very well regulated. The research also shows that, regulated or not, teaching is a low priority for most economics graduate students. At top universities it has long been understood that research is the main priority, and the current study shows that quite clearly. The system, for better or for worse, is designed based on graduate students' ability to secure funding to do research by teaching undergraduates, which clearly continues to be an issue. An article from *The Harvard Crimson* discusses this very issue, "Lost in Translation: The College Should Ensure that All TFs are Proficient in English" (Crimson Staff, 2010). This article discusses the problem of international graduate students holding TA duties (called TFs, or teaching fellows, at Harvard):

It is unfortunate that (undergraduate) students have to worry about communication barriers when they are already struggling to learn and understand the course material. This problem has become a growing issue at Harvard and seems to especially affect students taking courses in math and the sciences, where classes are often large and English is not necessarily internal to the subject matter.

As seen in my study, the concept of English not being internal to the subject matter is prevalent, and may exist in fields outside math and science. Because those fields are dominated by students from other countries, undergraduate courses in those areas often employ ITAs.

In economics those students doing highly quantitative work are going to be successful because of quality of the technical nature of the work; the message about English is secondary, or only related to teaching as seen at Eastwood. A comment posted by a graduate student in response to the article is perhaps the most telling:

Grad students do not want to teach. And there is little motivation for them to do a good job. Teaching, and even more so teaching well, just takes time away from lab, and contributes little to career advancement. If you're teaching, it's usually because you're forced to, to get paid or satisfy department requirements. And graduate departments and supervisors want their students to teach (whether or not they're effective) because it pays the bills and helps them get good faculty positions. So the real problem here is lack of incentive on the part of TFs, due to the structure of this system.

My data supports this argument, except the notion that graduate students do not want to teach. At Westfield, many students told me how much they enjoy teaching, though as we learned from Ron Bin at Westfield, “teaching is a form of procrastination.” Teaching is fun, though not required and not that beneficial in the field. The above comment suggests that teaching helps graduate students get good faculty positions, though again in my study there were several examples where in fact students could get good jobs without having taught.

At Eastwood, however, I am sure that students would prefer not to teach, if it could help them avoid issues of funding or English language proficiency. If they did not have to teach or worry about funding, they would not have to worry about the ITA policy or the English language requirement, and in that sense they would have been

much more similar to the students at Westfield. What is important here is that the *Crimson* comment laments the structure of the system. It is understood that graduate students in general, regardless of their communication skills or native language, may not be effective TAs, which is largely a result of the priorities that they learn, shown by the institutional analysis to be deeply embedded in their day to day experiences in graduate school.

The question therefore becomes one of repercussions for the undergraduate students, the graduate students, and the university at large. What is the effect of having so many non-native English speakers working as TAs in undergraduate course? Ideally students benefit from having teachers from diverse backgrounds, but not when they cannot communicate well. ITA programs that work to address these issues try to help prepare ITAs for ways to communicate with students and how to break down the communication barrier, but more effort is needed from the other side as well. Undergraduates need to learn how to communicate with all TAs and professors, regardless of their background.

One can also speculate about more long-lasting repercussions than a student's particular experience in one course. My study revealed quite a few stereotypes held by both domestic and international students about the other. What do undergraduates think when they take courses in a field dominated by people they see as quite different from themselves? When there is communication breakdown, in particular, students may get turned off to the field in general. The pipeline issue previously mentioned is related here. Undergraduate students who have negative experiences in their college courses may then choose not to pursue the field long-term, which could be another explanation for why fewer domestic students pursue advanced degrees in certain fields. Borjas (2004) talks about the notion of "crowd out." It is not hard to imagine the perception that international students are in some ways crowding out domestic

students. The crowd out can happen immediately: for example, a student does not choose to attend a program that has a high percentage of international students, or loses a spot to such a student. I also speculate that it could happen over time: a student may not choose to pursue graduate study in a field that was dominated by internationals when she was an undergraduate, or in which she perceived negative experiences because of the communication skills of international graduate students when she was an undergraduate. The second case provides even further evidence of the importance of promoting effective communication between all teachers and students, but particularly between international graduate students and undergraduates.

#### Admissions

Another related issue here is admissions. At both Eastwood and Westfield, for the most part, once students were accepted into the program they were able to continue in it. At Westfield, students reported that no one really gets kicked out. While the message was not as strong at Eastwood, it does seem that for the most part students continue in their programs. As such, programs should be particularly attentive to who they admit.

Admissions standards are important in terms of content ability, but also in terms of English language proficiency. It makes sense that if graduate programs want to address English language issues, they should look at the language requirements for admission. A long-standing problem for international admissions is the reliability of assessment instruments. Up until 2005, there was not even a speaking component on the TOEFL test, the most commonly accepted English language assessment (Getting Ready, 2005). There is now a speaking component, though issues with level setting and questions about the reliability of the test are persistent. In my professional work I have sat on panels and worked with administrators to make sense of the test scores; the verdict is still out on standard setting. Most problematic is that most administrators

considering admission issues do not have expertise in English language ability, so it may be hard to judge students' scores, or to decide what particular level is appropriate for a program.

In this study, recall the dean at Westfield's complaint about admissions:

Graduate admissions is totally decentralized. The applications come in to our office and get sent out to the departments, and each department has its own committee. Each committee will do things in its own way. For instance in one department you may have people sit down and whittle things down and it's very easy because it's a unified department, but if you are dealing with (other departments) you may have different wings, even in economics you've got people from different areas of economics.

At least at Westfield, the system makes having a universal standard for admissions is nearly impossible. The rationale for having admissions decisions made by committee, by field, ensures that admitted students have the content knowledge to excel in their programs, but again, English language ability may be easily overlooked, especially in fields where technical expertise is more valued.

#### Content vs. Language

A key point of interest here is the perception that *English skills are distinct from academics and content knowledge*. This perception, also detailed by Valdez, et al (2003) contributes to the learning and not learning of languages, and could be a partial explanation for American monolingualism. It is better to learn content than language, language is remedial, and those with strong technical expertise do not need to communicate well. Would the perceptions hold if the United States were producing more domestic scholars? The long-standing pipeline issues in U.S. education are also related to this topic. The face of scholarly work is being shaped by these constraints and issues about which students are both prepared and willing to do graduate level technical work.



Moreover, are perceptions about non-native English speakers actually related to language ability, or more about cultural differences, grouping preferences or field of study? Use of the language ideology lens enables the revelation of a number of stereotypes about which types of students study in which fields. My participants had no qualms saying that Chinese students are better at math, that econometricians do not need to speak English very well and that Americans are not interested in fields where they cannot tell beautiful stories. One reaction to this discussion could be positive: students from around the world can work together to build a stronger knowledge base, based on the strengths of people from different backgrounds. Another reaction is negative, however. The study showed a difficulty communicating across groups, both language groups and groups of students in different subfields, so in the end, knowledge is not being shared as well as it could be in the graduate system.

#### Power of the Discipline

The study clearly shows the supremacy of the discipline in graduate study. Without the intervention of the graduate school at Eastwood, and the relative wealth at Westfield, both departments seem remarkably similar. The broader field of economics is dictating the way students navigate their PhD programs, as institutional theory predicted. At the same time, regulation and intervention is not the norm in graduate school; the university administration is definitely decoupled from the technical core of students' graduate school experiences, except in the case of the ITA policy at Eastwood. It is interesting to see such a clear case of intervention in an otherwise loose system; it seems to function this way largely because it is tied to the basic funding needs of the department.

The fact that adherence to the ITA policy at Eastwood is incongruous to the way the economics PhD program operates but is successful can help explain why the ITA policy is simply seen as a means to secure funding. There is no conception of the

policy as a way to help students develop their communication skills, be more successful on the job market or in any other way perform as successful future faculty in economics, which might be explained by the understanding that it does not come from the field. Recall Figure 3 from Chapter 5.

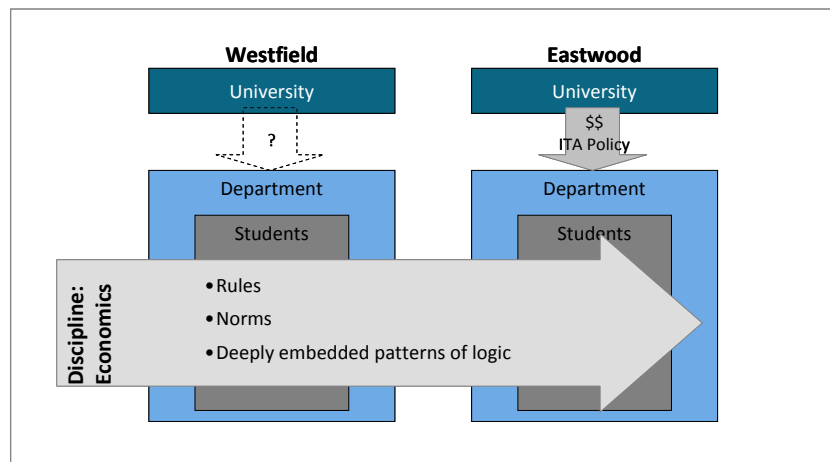


Figure 3: Influence of the Discipline

In Chapter 5 I began a discussion about which students are better off, those students who receive an intervention in their language and teaching skills, as at Eastwood, or those who do not, as at Westfield. In part, the answer depends on one's perspective. Clearly the author of *The Harvard Crimson* article is arguing for a required intervention. Those interested in improved teaching and learning and more effective TAs will argue for an intervention. However, will the intervention benefit graduate students outside the practice of teaching, or is really separate from academics, as expressed in the study?

There is no easy answer to this question. I believe that universities have a responsibility to prepare well-rounded individuals who are not only experts in their fields but who can communicate their expertise well. My perspective comes from my experience as a language and communication instructor, however. In the end it comes

down a difference of opinion: should students be broadly talented or narrowly focused? In some of my preparatory dissertation work, I spoke with a chemistry professor about this issue. He said he wanted to encourage all of his graduate students to attend as many workshops as they could, to do all the training they could, to become as educated as possible in all the different areas of chemistry. At the same time, he told me, his own priorities are in direct opposition to what he wanted to tell his students. How can he tell them to go off to a workshop, when he really wants them in the lab, advancing his research? He expressed his frustration with the system, and the contradiction inherent to it.

A conversation I had with a Chinese mathematics PhD student also informs this issue. He took a language and pedagogy class I taught, and often lamented the time my class required him to be away from his research. I learned from working with the student one on one that he only ate one meal a day, in order to maximize his time on his work. I also learned, over time, that he often slept in his office, also to save time. I used to encourage him to go home, to eat more, to take a walk. I tried to discuss with him my perspective that time spent away from work can be useful, and that good health promotes good work: could he not take a walk around campus and then be struck with an insight into his work that would be even clearer when he returned to his office? Could he not take a lunch break that would prove to be enlightening to his afternoon work? No, he said. He also told me that his advisor often told him that he should be completely focused on mathematics study during his PhD; that graduate school is a luxury, and the only time in your life when you can be completely focused on work. According to this student, he has the rest of his life and career to worry about other things.

While this student had probably the most extreme views of any I have encountered in my professional work, he does bring up a valid point that the chemistry

professor shares are well. There is an inherent contradiction in some academic work between being focused and being broadly talented. Striking a balance between the two is quite challenging. Such contradictions came through in my study, but for the most part I found that it pays more to be narrowly focused. Disciplinary norms, rules, and deeply embedded patterns of logic value focus, at least in economics, according to my study. Perhaps students feel, like my math student, that when they become faculty, after they get tenure, they can worry about other priorities. This discussion also connects back to the idea of crowd out. It is difficult to imagine an American student willing to skip meals, sacrifice sleep and give up all semblances of a balanced life to pursue a PhD. Students' dedication to their work is fueled by their cultural and educational background, and future goals.

So what does this mean for the system now? Attitudes like the ones my Chinese math student has help explain the struggles of ITA trainers and ESL teachers in higher education. Without a clear message of the program's importance, or worse, a disciplinary message that it is not a priority, students automatically may perceive that communication classes are not that important. Universities should understand that graduate students, at least in economics, get their messages from the field of economics. Whatever messages they want to communicate that are external to the field, whether it is programming to improve communication between students or to help prepare teaching assistants, should try as much as possible to be aligned with disciplinary messages in order to help create buy in. Program planners should consult with faculty and disciplinary experts, and learn about the norms and taken for granted elements of specific fields in order to create more successful programming. Such programming may prove to be crucial to the continued success of the American university system.

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